MUHAMMAD ﷺ

HIS CHARACTER AND CONDUCT

Adil Salahi

DEDICATION

To

Hussain Abu Dawood

In acknowledgement of his unfailing support and
encouragement to write this book

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Consonants. Arabic
initial: unexpressed, medial and final: ء ʾ

a	ا	d	د	ḍ	ض	k	ك
b	ب	dh	ذ	ṭ	ط	l	ل
t	ت	r	ر	ẓ	ظ	m	م
th	ث	z	ز	ʿ	ع	n	ن
j	ج	s	س	gh	غ	h	هـ
ḥ	ح	sh	ش	f	ف	w	و
kh	خ	ṣ	ص	q	ق	y	ي

Vowels, diphthongs, etc.

Short:	a	ـَ	i	ـِ	u	ـُ
long:	ā	ـَا	ī	ـِي	ū	ـُو
diphthongs:			aw	ـَوْ		
			ay	ـَيْ		

INTRODUCTION

HE HAS INFLUENCED my life in great measure. I have known him since I was very young, even though he lived 1400 years ago. My parents taught me to love him as though he was the light that guided our family. My primary school teachers nurtured this love further, and in my first year of secondary school my teacher gave me a book about his life as a prize for being at the top of the class in Arabic. In my first professional work I dramatized a major part of his life for radio. I later wrote a book about the events of his life, and that book has been reprinted several times. For thirty-one years from 1981 to 2012, I edited a weekly column entitled "Islam in Perspective" for the Saudi paper, *Arab News*, and each time I wrote an article about him or what he taught. I still feel that all this falls far short of what he deserves. How can I – or indeed anyone – portray what he has given to humanity, when he remains the light that brings pure happiness to the life of millions across the world?

Muhammad ibn ʿAbdullāh, born in Makkah in 570 CE to a father on whose face he never set eyes, was the man to whom God entrusted the task of delivering His final message to mankind. God undertook to preserve this message for the rest of human life. The task assigned to Muhammad was enormous. His was not merely a message to be delivered and signed for; he was to provide guidance for contemporary and future generations on its implementation. His guidance is the light that shines through every community that decides to abide by how God wants humanity to live. A guidance that will continue to apply to every individual and every community for as long as human life continues.

This was the Prophet's miracle. He did not tell people that he would work miracles for them, or show them spectacular feats that left them stunned with amazement. Instead, he offered a system of life that provided for all the needs of body, soul and emotions. Moreover, he elevated their aspirations towards a

sublime ideal. Through his actions, he showed them the way to achieve all this in a very simple, direct and honest manner. What they had to endeavour to achieve was within everyone's reach. There were no complications or arbitrary impositions.

Hundreds of books have been written about the Prophet and the events of his life. The majority of these are by Muslims who have loved and followed him; although some are by detractors whose standpoint is to reject him and his message. Usually, the more a person learns about the life and message of the Prophet, the more they admire him.

In his first forty years, before the start of his message, Muhammad lived among his people: sharing their concerns, but steering away from anything that was wrong or unbecoming. He made a name for himself as an honest and truthful person. Later, fleeing assassins, he was chased into the desert with a great prize set on his head; yet his trust in God and in the truth of his message remained as firm as a mountain. At one point the danger was close and Surāqah, his pursuer, was ready to strike, yet he promised Surāqah that he would wear the bracelets of Khusru, the Persian Emperor. That promise was to come true after Muhammad had passed away.

Within less than ten years, the life of the Prophet underwent a great change. That rider, travelling with two men and a guide along 500 kilometres of unfamiliar roads in the Arabian desert to escape his pursuers, became the undisputed master of the whole of Arabia. He built a state that was dedicated to the truth and justice and to the liberation of man throughout the world. He wrote to Emperors, kings and rulers, calling on them to believe in God and to follow His message; yet at the same time he lived a life of poverty. He did not disdain to accept an invitation from a poor person, and would gladly share a humble dinner of bread with fat that had started to rot. One day, he came home to eat but the only food available in his home was a small portion of bread and some vinegar. His comment at this was: "Vinegar is fine food to go with bread." He said this at a time when he could have had the finest riches the world could provide.

I have said that his trust in God was as firm as a mountain. Indeed, mountains might come crashing down, and yet the Prophet's faith would remain unshaken. At moments of extreme danger, he was full of confidence that the truth he preached would triumph. At the moment of his greatest triumph he showed humility and gave due thanks to the Almighty. With yesterday's enemies – the very ones who plotted his assassination and determined to exterminate his community – at his mercy, he was remarkably magnanimous. The sight

that gave him most satisfaction at the end of his blessed life was that of his followers offering a congregational prayer in his mosque. He felt then that he had delivered God's message and fulfilled his task.

Today, the Prophet is much maligned by writers, cartoonists, bloggers and various other detractors whose information about him is both scanty and false. He is attacked, particularly, on three issues: his many marriages, his marriage to ʿĀ'ishah (who is said to have been a child at the time) and his treatment of the Jews, particularly the Qurayẓah tribe. An in-depth study of all these issues shows that there is nothing to criticize. Nevertheless, the attack continues. Unfortunately, most Muslims today do not know the Prophet well enough to portray his life in its true colours. Rather, when these attacks are made anger is heightened throughout the Muslim world. This serves to deepen the rift between Muslims and non-Muslims: particularly between the Muslim world and the West. This is contrary to what most people throughout the world want. Better understanding is needed on both sides of the divide.

My first book about the Prophet, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, sought to record the main events of his life, with analysis and comments. In this book my aim is to show his true character. However, as I write, I feel that I am falling far short of my aim. I can only express my shortcomings in the words of John Dryden:

> How can the less the greater comprehend?
> Or finite reason reach infinity?[1]

How can I show the two opposite extremes: life at its most ordinary and life at its highest perfection? The Prophet combined the two in a most natural way. If I am able to give my reader a glimpse of this, then my effort has been worthwhile.

My readers will realize that I am not trying to refute any allegations levelled at the Prophet. I am only attempting to present his character. In this, I have been guided by what the Qur'ān – God's own word – says about him, by his own statements and teachings and by what his Companions have passed on to us of what he said and did. I have only relied on authentic sources. However, I have excluded a number of reports and statements that may have strengthened an argument or illustrated a point, when I felt that they included a sentence or a word that could throw some doubt on them, often despite their inclusion in one of the authentic collections of the Prophet's *aḥādīth* (traditions).

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I have devoted a chapter to the case of the Qurayẓah Jews and their fate, and in this discussion I take an entirely different line from the traditional approach. Readers can judge for themselves whether my argument is valid. Neither in this case, nor in any issue of controversy, do I try to defend the Prophet or justify his actions. There is nothing in his actions or teachings that needs any justification; what is needed is to understand the situation by looking at all aspects, circumstances and available options.

What remains to be said is that no portrait of the Prophet's character will do him justice. He was superior to anything we can imagine. Perhaps the description that comes closest to the truth is that he was "the teacher of perfect goodness." May God reward him well for having taught that perfect goodness to humanity.

Adil Salahi
London
August 2012

CHAPTER I

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

MUHAMMAD, THE PROPHET OF ISLAM, was an ordinary human being. Muslims throughout the world acknowledge this fact. No Islamic school of thought assigns any different status to him. None attributes any Divine nature to him. The Qur'ān emphasises this fact also: stating it repeatedly, while making it clear that he was entrusted with God's final message to mankind. His role was to deliver this message in full. The message is contained in the Qur'ān, which is God's own word. God has guaranteed that the Qur'ān will be preserved in its original form for all time. Thus the Qur'ān that we have today is exactly the same as that which Muhammad read out to his community over 1400 years ago, as not a word of it has ever changed. As God's Messenger, Muhammad also explained the Qur'ān. He elaborated on aspects that were stated in general terms, provided details where these were needed and corrected misconceptions where such arose. He also, in his own life, provided a practical example of how believers should conduct their lives. That which Muhammad has given us, in addition to the Qur'ān, is called the *Sunnah*. The *Sunnah* is an essential part of the Islamic faith, as it serves as an explanatory memorandum for the Qur'ān. Muslims approach the *Sunnah* as a complement of the Qur'ān, but it does not have the same status. It is, in fact, part of the revelation that the Prophet received, but it is expressed in his own words. Since it is a man's word, it cannot be read in prayer.

Muhammad became a Prophet at the age of forty. Prior to that, he was not known to speak about religion, God, the status of man or even moral values and conduct. If he thought of such matters, his thoughts remained private, as he did not speak about them to anyone, not even to his wife or closest friends. No friend or foe ever said to him anything like, "I remember the time you used

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to tell us about religion or moral values." No one has suggested that Islam was a development of earlier ideas expressed by Muhammad in any form.

Prophets are a special breed of people, as they assume the task of preaching to people while also setting a practical example. However, there is a subset of Prophets who attain a higher status: God's Messengers, who are given messages to deliver to people. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus were the highest and noblest of God's Messengers. There have been other Messengers also: some are named in the Qur'ān, while others are not mentioned. All of these Prophets and Messengers preached the same Divine faith, which was based on God's Oneness. They taught that all submission is to Him alone, and all worship must be addressed purely to Him. Ultimately, the Divine message was brought to its final and complete form, and addressed to all mankind, in all generations. This is the message of Muhammad, as embodied in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

In this book, we are embarking on studying Muhammad, the man. I will only touch on his message and his teachings through a study of his personality. I do not aim to present the Islamic faith or to illustrate its main principles. Instead, I will begin by looking at his background, the social environment in which he was born and grew up, and the cultural aspects of the society in which he lived as a youth and adult. I will then look at how his personality developed as he went about fulfilling the task that was assigned to him as God's Messenger.

Muhammad was born in 570 CE in Makkah, the most important city in Arabia at the time. The Arabs lived in the land that today forms the entire Arabian Peninsula, as well as Palestine, Jordan, southern Syria and southern Iraq. Theirs was a tribal society, which considered allegiance to tribe as the paramount bond between people. Individuals identified themselves as members of a tribe, and the tribe protected and defended its individual members. A tribe could easily go to war against other tribes over a dispute that involved only one or two of its members. In such cases, right and wrong were of secondary importance, as tribal loyalty was supreme.

These tribes could be large or small. A large tribe could branch out into several clans. The separate clans considered themselves cousins, but they would still compete for honour and prestige. Clans had autonomy, and allegiance was always to one's closest bond. Thus, an individual owed allegiance first to family, then to clan, then to tribe. Tribes enjoyed prestige based on their history, ancestry and strength. Even major tribes took pride in belonging to still larger ones. Indeed, all Arabs belonged to one of two main divisions: ʿAdnān and Qaḥṭān.

At the time when Muhammad was born, Makkah was inhabited by the Quraysh tribe, which was recognized by all Arabs as the master tribe. Before the Quraysh, Makkah belonged to the tribe of Khuzāʿah, which in turn had

taken over from Jurhum. Muhammad belonged to the Hāshim clan, which had held authority in Makkah for several generations. In fact, his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, was the chief of Makkah, with an authority that was recognized by all the Quraysh clans. The status of the Quraysh as the master tribe was enhanced by the position of the Kaʿbah in Makkah. The Kaʿbah was built by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, who was also a Prophet. It continued to be visited and venerated by people ever since it was built.

In this social environment, Muhammad was born. At the time, children who belonged to distinguished families in that society were usually looked after by Bedouin wet nurses, who came to Makkah seeking to take babies home with them. The Makkan families believed that it would be in the best interests of their children to spend their first couple of years in the desert, where the clean air and environment would ensure that they had a healthy start. The Bedouin families received financial help in return for caring for the town children. So, within a few days of his birth, Muhammad was given to the Bedouin woman Ḥalīmah, who was to breastfeed and look after him. Ḥalīmah was from the tribe of Saʿd ibn Bakr, which branches out of Hawāzin.

Two factors must have had profound effects on Muhammad during his early years. The first was the loss of his immediate relatives. His parents' marriage lasted only a few weeks, after which his father, ʿAbdullāh, travelled to Syria with the traditional trade caravan that travelled there every year. On his way back he was taken ill. The caravan people left him in Madinah to be nursed by his maternal relatives, but he did not recover, and he died soon afterwards. Muhammad's mother, Āminah, died a few years later, when he was only six years of age. A mother's death is keenly felt by a child, but perhaps even more so in young Muhammad's case, as he was with her on a journey that took them to Madinah where they visited his father's grave. The distance from Makkah to Madinah is over 450 kilometres. When they reached al-Abwā', a village that is a little closer to Makkah than to Madinah, Āminah was taken ill and died. The child was left to the care of his nursemaid, Umm Ayman, who took him back home. Muhammad's grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, then looked after him, but he, in turn, died when Muhammad was only eight.

Such a sequence of loss of immediate and loved relatives is bound to have a profound effect on a young person. Muhammad remembered his mother to his last days. More than fifty years later, he visited her grave in al-Abwā', and as he stood at her grave, he wept in grief. He told his Companions that he had sought God's permission to visit her grave, and his request was granted.[1]

[1] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Book of Funerals).

In reply to a question from some of his Companions, the Prophet stated that he vividly remembered his grandfather's death. Similarly, his nursemaid, Umm Ayman, stated that he wept much at the time.[2] From this, we can see that young Muhammad's grief over his losses was keen indeed.

The death of these close relatives must have given Muhammad the recognition that life brings whatever it might, with no guarantees to anyone: no one has a rightful claim to anything other than what is given. Later, he would associate this with God's will, to emphasize that no one could expect anything other than what God grants.

The second factor that must have influenced Muhammad in his early formative years was the love he received from those around him. He was dearly loved by Ḥalīmah, his wet nurse, and her family; not least because they soon realized that he was a blessed child. Nor did she feel that breastfeeding him along with her own son placed much of a strain on her. On completing two years of breastfeeding, Ḥalīmah duly took him back to his mother, Āminah. However, Ḥalīmah requested that the child remain with her, as the desert area where she lived was a much healthier environment than Makkah. Āminah agreed, and Muhammad stayed with Ḥalīmah until he was four.

Back in Makkah, the four-year-old child was looked after by his mother, under the watchful eye of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, his grandfather. They both felt that there was something special about the child. The grandfather gave him a special treatment, making allowances that no child would usually be afforded in the rigid tribal community of Makkah. Perhaps the circumstances of his birth (although more probably the nature of the child) gave the old sage a feeling that the boy would have a bright future. In Arabia, where there was always fierce competition for honour, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the Makkan chief who was around a hundred years of age, might have hoped that the boy would grow up to put the honour of his Hāshimite clan at a higher level. Yet, as noted above, within four years of returning to Makkah, Muhammad lost both his mother and grandfather. Thus, at eight years of age, Muhammad had to move home again and live with his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who was soon to assume a highly distinguished position of honour in Makkah, being the head of the Hāshimite clan. Abū Ṭālib, however, was a man of limited means and a large family, but he was a model Arab chief. The standing of his family, clan and tribe was paramount in his mind. To him, Muhammad was not a mere orphan nephew: he was soon to be a young man with fine qualities. Abū Ṭālib could see in Muhammad a bright child with great promise. His docile and loving nature augured well for his future, and

[2] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, pp. 116-119.

Abū Ṭālib thought that Muhammad could continue the tradition of his noble ancestors who enhanced the standing of their clan in Arabia. Abū Ṭālib loved Muhammad as he loved his own children, with perhaps a little favouritism also, considering the particular situation of the child and the blessing that seemed to emanate from him.

In his uncle's home, Muhammad was looked after by two women: Fāṭimah bint Asad (Abū Ṭālib's wife) and Umm Ayman (his nursemaid). Both showered him with motherly love. When Fāṭimah died some fifty years later, the Prophet, who was the ruler of Arabia, personally attended to her preparation of burial. Expressing his grief for her loss, he said:

> May God shower His mercy on you, mother. You were to me a mother after I had lost my mother: you went hungry so that I could have enough to eat; you gave me clothes that you were in more need of; you denied yourself the good things of life so that I could enjoy them; and you sought only God's reward for all that.[3]

Umm Ayman was a slave woman from Abyssinia who belonged to his father ʿAbdullāh. According to the traditions of the time, she belonged to him after his father's death. Yet, in Islamic tradition, she is never referred to as a slave, rather, she is always described as his nursemaid. She was a kindly woman who witnessed his childhood from the moment of his birth. She was his only companion when his mother died on the return journey from Madinah when he was only six years of age. She brought him back to his grandfather, who instructed her to look after Muhammad and to never let him out of her sight. She needed no incentive to do that, for the child was dear to her. When he grew up, Muhammad acknowledged her role and reciprocated her kindness. On his marriage to Khadījah, when he was twenty-five, Muhammad set her free. He was later to give her in marriage to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, who was the dearest man to him. She gave Zayd a son, named Usāmah, whom the Prophet loved as his own child. When Muhammad (peace be upon him) became God's Messenger, Umm Ayman and her family were among the early converts to Islam. She continued to enjoy his kindness to his last days. He used to say of her: "Umm Ayman is the last of my family, and she was to me a mother after my mother had passed away."[4]

In his upbringing, then, Muhammad suffered the loss of his immediate relatives who cared most for him: his parents and grandfather. Yet, he was never

[3] Ahmad Khaleel Jumaah, *Nisā' min ʿAṣr al-Nabiy*, Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus, 2003, p. 23.
[4] Ibid., p. 25

away from a family home where he received love, kindness and motherly care. There were many women to love Muhammad and care for him, as he had six paternal aunts who were all kindly and loving.

When we look at Muhammad's childhood and upbringing, we will not fail to notice that the guiding hand of God was always there to ensure that he did not lack what was necessary for a fine start in life. He lost his dear ones, but he did not lack tenderly love. The question is: how did his particular situation affect his character? For one thing, having to deal with the occurrence of death at such an early age would surely have led him to question the meaning of life. For another, living in an uncle's home full of cousins would have given him the feeling of being an addition to the family, but not belonging to it. He would have a more detached outlook at whatever affected the family. As he grew up, this would make him more independent in his way of thinking and would broaden his outlook, as he would differentiate between Abū Ṭālib and his other uncles. Moreover, it gave him a more conscious vision of his place in the family and in his tribe. Thus, we see him clinging to his uncle Abū Ṭālib as he embarked on a business trip to Syria. He requested that he travel with his uncle, although it was unusual for a boy to join such a trip at that age. Abū Ṭālib would not hear of it at first, yet not much persuasion was needed and the twelve-year-old boy undertook his first long journey.

Ḥalīmah, his wet nurse, reported that she felt a blessing coming into her family from the moment she took Muhammad from his mother. That blessing manifested itself in the provisions of the family. Bedouins lived on the produce of their sheep, camels and cows. Even in hard times, when grazing was a hard task, her cattle seemed to produce plenty of milk for the family. She associated that with having that fine baby. For this reason, she wanted to keep him beyond the normal term. Abū Ṭālib felt the same. He noticed that when Muhammad joined the family dinner, everyone ate their fill and a little extra was usually left. When Muhammad was absent, the food was hardly enough. Hence, if Muhammad was late, the meal would be delayed until he had arrived. This was merely a subtle observation, as there was no tangible element to it, and Muhammad was not afforded a special status in consequence. Life in his uncle's home merely went on as usual.

Plenty of stories exist to indicate that the people around Muhammad realized that he was destined for a significant role. One report states, for example, that on his trip to Syria he was recognized by a Christian monk who questioned him closely. The monk advised Muhammad's uncle to take special care of him and offered a warning that Muhammad must not be recognized by Jews. However, we have no means to confirm the authenticity of such reports. The

events were certainly not mentioned by the Prophet, as he ultimately assumed his role as God's Messenger. Hence, these stories should be taken for what they are worth, and should have no part in the formation of our understanding of Muhammad's character.

On the other hand, the women who looked after Muhammad during his early life certainly influenced his outlook. Āminah, Ḥalīmah, Umm Ayman and Fāṭimah bint Asad all gave him unmitigated love. This enabled him to understand the role of women in life. His society ill-treated women and gave them a status that was inferior to that of men. In the hierarchy of that society, a slave woman was of a very low status indeed. A wet nurse was not much higher, except for the fact that she was a free woman. In fact, all women were considered to be inferior. In his early years, Muhammad was looked after by two women of lowly status: Ḥalīmah and Umm Ayman. He realized that he owed them much love. Hence, it was not difficult for him later, as God's Messenger, to stress women's equal status. To his last day, he advocated women's rights in every form. He often repeated his warnings against denying orphans and women their rights, as these represented two of the weakest elements in human society.

Muhammad lived with his uncle until he became an adult. Despite his honourable position in Makkah, Abū Ṭālib was a man of limited means. Times were tough, and apparently he was not very successful in business. In addition to this, he had a large family. Therefore, when Muhammad came back to Makkah with his uncle after their business trip to Syria, Muhammad felt that he had to do something to ease his uncle's burden. He wanted to work, but there was little to do in Makkah at the time. Makkah had no agriculture, as the city was encircled by mountains and very little rain fell at any time. Nor was it deemed respectable for a free Arab – let alone one belonging to a distinguished family – to undertake any manual jobs, as these belonged to slaves and servants. Makkah prospered because of two factors: trade and the status of the Kaʿbah at its centre. The Kaʿbah attracted visitors throughout the year, but at the time of the annual pilgrimage, people came in their thousands. What was there for an adolescent to do, then? The only employment a teenager could have in Makkah at the time, without casting a blemish on his standing, was to be a shepherd. So, Muhammad worked as a shepherd, bringing in a small wage that helped his uncle's family finances.

A shepherd's occupation allows much time for contemplation and reflection. As he took his sheep to graze, Muhammad's only duty was to watch them, ensuring that none went astray or was stolen by a passing Bedouin. Such a job fitted very well with Muhammad's docile temperament and his position in a family home, in which he stood somewhat apart. He did not speak about

those years, and did not tell us in which directions his thoughts took him. He has, however, told us something very significant: that all past Prophets spent some time in their early lives as shepherds. Is the job particularly suitable as preparation for the role of a Prophet? Camel attendants speak of their herd as a community in which every single camel has his own distinctive character. Does this apply to sheep as well? A shepherd endowed with insight and intelligence would be able to look at his flock as individuals and identify them by their special features. Contemplation and reflection would enable such a shepherd to carry that to the wider community and reflect on what distinguishes and influences human characters. Perhaps it is this opportunity to reflect on man, life, aims and destiny that makes a shepherd's job particularly suitable as preparation for a Prophet's future role.

The role of a Prophet is a very special one. No human experience can make a person ready to assume it. No instructor or institution can provide training for it. Since God chooses the individuals who undertake this task, He provides them with the necessary preparation. Without such help, preparation and guidance, no one can meet the requirements of the task or successfully undertake it. Muhammad's preparation for his future task started in his early days. He once explained his exceptional mastery of the Arabic tongue, stating that he had two very good elements contributing to it: belonging to the Quraysh and spending his early years among the Sa'd ibn Bakr tribe. Thus, we can see his extended stay with that tribe as part of such preparation, as it covered the time of a child's language acquisition. The same applies to his career, particularly his job as a shepherd.

We do not know how many years Muhammad worked as a shepherd, but it must have taken him well into adolescence and probably beyond. As a young man growing up in a society characterized by loose sexual morality, Muhammad heard many stories of his comrades' sexual adventures, and it was natural that he would think of trying this for himself. He tells us that on two occasions he requested a fellow shepherd to look after his sheep while he tried his luck at having some pleasure. On both occasions, he would stand by a house where a wedding party was going on, only to be overtaken by deep sleep. He was awakened, both times, by the morning sun. He remarked later that it was an act of Divine protection of the future Prophet from sinking into immoral behaviour.

Several incidents took place during this period. He reported that as a young lad, he was once playing with other boys, who were picking up stones for a game. They were naked. Just as he undressed to join them, he felt a painful punch and a voice told him to put his robe on. The same thing occurred much

later, when the Quraysh renovated the building of the Ka'bah. All the people shared in the work and he was carrying stones on his shoulder. His uncle, al-'Abbās, suggested that he should use his lower garment as a cushion to protect his shoulder. Again a stern voice warned him against it.

A more important instance of protection against unworthy behaviour relates to religious worship. The Arabs worshipped idols that represented deities, which they claimed were God's partners. Muhammad had an instinctive dislike of all such idols, recognizing that they were inanimate objects that could bring neither good nor harm. However, people normally go along with the practices of their communities, particularly on festive occasions. Muhammad was protected from that. His nursemaid, Umm Ayman, reports that:

> The Quraysh used to pay homage to an idol called Buwābah. On a particular day each year they organized a special festival in its honour. They stayed near the idol all day long and shaved their heads. Abū Ṭālib, the Prophet's uncle, did not fail to attend the festival. Every year he asked his orphan nephew to attend, but Muhammad declined. Abū Ṭālib was angry with him, and even his aunts spoke to Muhammad about his apparent lack of respect for the idols. They tried to persuade him not to remain the odd one out in his family. In their representation, they touched on a young man's duty to show his loyalty to his family. They said: "You seem not to wish to share any festival with your people, and not to be counted as one of their number."
>
> Ultimately Muhammad yielded to his aunts' pleading and went to the festival. He came back in a state of fear. He told his aunts that he feared he might be possessed by an evil spirit. They assured him that God would never let him suffer such a thing, considering his numerous good qualities. Relating his experience to them, he said: "Every time I came near to an idol, I saw a tall white man telling me to hold back and not to touch the idol." Umm Ayman stresses that that was the first and the last idol festival Muhammad attended until he began to receive his Qur'ānic revelations.[5]

Yet, Muhammad shared in every good aspect of his community's life. When he was only fifteen, he helped his uncles as they fought what was known as the Fijār war. This four-year war was started in the sacred months where Arabian

[5] Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Beirut, Dar Sadir, vol. 1, p. 158.

tradition prohibited any fighting. Hence its name, which suggests the violation of sanctity. The combatants were the two major Arabian tribes of the Quraysh and the Qays ʿAylān. Shortly after this war was over, when Muhammad was nearly twenty, he took part in forging the noble al-Fuḍūl alliance, which committed the Quraysh clans to stand united in support of anyone subjected to any injustice in Makkah, whether they belonged to Makkah or were visitors.

Around this time, Muhammad was looking for a new job, and trade was the pillar of Makkah's economy. Muhammad started to work as an agent for a famous businesswoman called Khadījah. She was a wealthy widow who carried business in the famous Arabian markets. Muhammad is reported to have worked for her in the Ḥubāshah market place. He had a partner who worked with him. Apparently, he worked for modest wages. However, the best opportunity a young man of his age could have was to join a trade caravan as an agent of one of the Makkan businessmen. Khadījah needed such an agent, and the experience she had with Muhammad encouraged her to send him as her agent in the traditional summer trade caravan to Syria. The venture was highly successful, as Muhammad secured handsome profits for Khadījah at both ends of the trip. It is not clear whether he went on several such business trips, but his performance was highly impressive. Khadījah had sent a servant of hers called Maysarah with him, who reported to her on Muhammad's honesty, integrity and business acumen.

As a wealthy widow, Khadījah had no shortage of suitors, including some with favourable social standing, but she had refused them all. Now she realized that she had found her eligible bachelor. Khadījah discreetly proposed marriage with Muhammad, and this was soon accomplished. It is suggested that Muhammad was twenty-five at the time while Khadījah was forty, but this is highly questionable. She gave him two sons and four daughters within ten years, which suggests that she was in the prime of her reproductive life. This means that she could not have been much over thirty. Indeed, a report by Ibn ʿAbbās, the Prophet's cousin, tells us that she was twenty-eight.

This was a very happy marriage, and Muhammad continued to manage Khadījah's business and the family lacked for nothing. He was a model husband and she was a very caring and loving wife. She was not disappointed in her choice: she had found a man of great integrity, who was well respected by his people for his honesty, courage and friendly temperament.

Perhaps it is appropriate at this stage to try to discover what sort of man Muhammad was.

We have detailed descriptions of his physical appearance. The most authentic of these are those that were related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Al-Barā' ibn

ʿĀzib reports: "God's Messenger was a man of the best appearance and the best manners. He was neither very tall nor short."[6] He also reports: "The Prophet was of middle height, with broad shoulders. His hair did not reach the lower end of his ears. I saw him once wearing a red suit, and I never saw anything more pleasant."[7] Al-Barā' was asked whether the Prophet's face was long. He said: "No. It was like the full moon." Other reports mention that his eyes were of sharp blackness against bright whiteness, with long, arch-shaped and rather thin eyebrows that did not meet in the middle. His head was large, with a wide forehead, straight cheeks, a curved nose, and a wide mouth with well-proportioned lips. He was of fair complexion with a touch of redness in his cheeks. His black hair was neither too curly nor lank. By the end of his life, he had only a few grey hairs. When he walked, his step was assured, as if he was going down a slightly sloping passage. He always addressed his interlocutor with his full face, swinging his entire body around if he needed to turn. He always had a charming smile that inspired confidence. Overall, he was very handsome and his body smell was very pleasant. Anas ibn Mālik reports: "I never touched silk or brocade that was smoother than the Prophet's palm; nor did I ever smell better perfume than the Prophet's body smell."[8]

His manners and moral values endeared him to the people who came into contact with him. The people of his clan, Hāshim, felt that he was one who would certainly fulfil his promise of a bright future. In the broader community of the Quraysh, he was highly respected for his integrity and sense of propriety. He was nicknamed *Al-Amīn*, which means "the trustworthy." This trait was acknowledged by his opponents, and even those who wished him dead admitted that he never failed to be true to his word.

Similarly, his kindness was never in doubt. Those who were close to him felt that he cared for all people, particularly those who were in a vulnerable position. What he did for Zayd ibn Ḥārithah gives us a good picture of his kindness. Zayd was a young lad who had been taken away from his tribe by raiders, who then sold him as a slave. He was apparently sold more than once before he was brought to Makkah and became Khadījah's slave when her uncle gave him to her as a gift. She in turn gifted him to Muhammad when they got married. By then Zayd was a teenager. Learning that Zayd was in Makkah, his father came over to secure his release. Rather than selling Zayd to his father, Muhammad offered him a choice of staying with him or going free with his

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6 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Manāqib (chapter on the Prophet's description).
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.

father. To the astonishment of the father, Zayd unhesitatingly opted for staying with Muhammad. He told his father that he would not part company with Muhammad for any reason. To reassure the father, Muhammad then freed Zayd and adopted him as a son.

As he grew older, Muhammad's wisdom became widely recognized. The Quraysh needed to renovate the Ka'bah, which they held to be a holy place. This cubic and nearly entirely black building had a stone of special significance (a meteoric black stone), which is placed at shoulder height in one corner of the building. This served as a mark for the beginning and end of the *ṭawāf* ritual. When the rebuilding was complete, this black stone needed to be placed back in position. Each clan wanted to have the honour of putting it back in place. Argument was heated and tempers flared up. Some people even called for a fight over this. However, a respected elderly person suggested arbitration, and the clans agreed to make the first entrant the arbiter. It was Muhammad who came through and they were all happy to let him arbitrate. He realized that reconciliation could only be achieved with a sharing of the honour. Therefore, he called for a cloth sheet to be placed on the floor. The black stone was put in the middle and a representative of each clan was chosen. These held the sheet and lifted it together. When the black stone was parallel with its location, Muhammad put it back in place. All were happy, as no clan could boast of having greater honour in the rebuilding of the Ka'bah.

As Muhammad was approaching his mid-thirties, there was no indication that he would have anything but the continuity of his happy married life while enjoying a good position in society. There are no reports of any travels in this period. Khadījah's trading was managed at home. Agents were hired to go with the trade caravans to Syria and Yemen. His two sons died in infancy, but his daughters were growing up and expected to move to their prospective husbands' homes. It was about this time that he began to seek some solitude where he could have undisturbed reflection. He would go to a cave in a nearby mountain, where he would spend several days in worship. No special form of worship is recorded, but this must have been a mostly verbal prayer addressed to God, the Creator.

Again, we can now see this as part of the preparation God's hand provided for him. Through long reflection in solitude, high up in the mountain where the universe appears so vast – particularly in the clear skies at night, with countless stars shining – the thought of God, the Omnipotent Creator, makes its presence clear. Another aspect of preparation that came even later, very close to the moment when he first received Divine revelations, was that of true dreams. Whenever he saw a dream pertaining to his social and physical environment,

it would soon come true, just as it had happened in the dream. This was to reassure him in advance that he was not being subjected to any foul play.

As he approached forty, Muhammad was a well-established family man. He was a highly respected figure in his tribe and in the Makkah community in general. His kindness was always forthcoming and his readiness to help anyone in need was assured. Then the great moment arrived. He was sleeping in the Cave of Ḥirā' in the mountain, when the angel came to him holding an open book and asking him to read. Muhammad was unlettered, and he replied that he could not read. The angel pressed on his chest with the book until he was almost out of breath, before releasing him and telling him again to read. Again he said he could not. This pattern was repeated twice. After the third time, the angel told him:

> Read in the name of your Lord who created man out of a germ-cell. Read; for your Lord is the most Bountiful One, who has taught the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know. (96: 1-5)

He woke up trembling. When he had calmed down, the angel came to him once more in full wakefulness, repeating exactly what had been said and done in the dream. As soon as this was all over he ran home to his wife. As he was trembling, he asked her to cover him up, which she did. When he regained his composure, he told her what he saw. She reassured him that nothing evil could happen to him, because "you are faithful to your trust, kind to your kinsfolk and you always tell the truth."

From that moment, Muhammad became God's Prophet. He was soon to learn that he was to be entrusted with a message to deliver to mankind.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY OF EVENTS DURING THE PROPHET'S LIFETIME

AS A MATURE MAN OF FORTY, Muhammad was now also a Prophet. It took some time for him to be reassured of his role, and in this Khadījah played an important part. She was certain that her husband – clearly a man of moral rectitude and wisdom – could have nothing to do with the world of evil. Eventually, with reassurance came belief. Muhammad now believed in God's Oneness and in the absolute falsehood of the idols that were worshipped by the Arabs. Once this was firmly established, the next stage was ushered in, and he became God's Messenger, with the task to make the right faith known to people and to call on them to believe in it and to bring their daily life in accordance with it. He was told:

> You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning. Glorify your Lord's greatness; clean your garments; stay away from all filth; do not hold up what you give away, showing it to be much; but to your Lord turn in patience. (74: 1-7)

In the first revelation, God told him to read. Bearing in mind that Muhammad was unlettered, this meant recitation from memory: an action that initially had little bearing on others. However, he was then told to arise and give warning. This was no longer a passive action to be performed for and by himself. Rather, this required interaction with others, as he was to warn them that they needed to believe in God's Oneness and abide by His commands. Muhammad (peace be upon him) henceforth known by his titles of the Prophet and God's Messenger – accepted both tasks and went about performing them as best as he could, praying to God to help him and trusting in His support. Following

Divine guidance, he began to approach people, explaining to them his role and message and calling on them to accept Islam: the new faith whose very name means total submission to God.

On God's instructions the Prophet began his mission in private, speaking to individuals who were close to him and whom he could trust. A family unit of Muslims was soon formed which included Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, who was around thirty years of age, Khadījah, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's young cousin whom he had taken into his home to ease his uncle's burden as Makkah went through hard times. Abū Bakr, the Prophet's close friend, also accepted Islam without hesitation. Other recruits soon followed, including the Prophet's daughters, Abū Ṭālib's wife Fāṭimah bint Asad, and Umm Ayman. Young men, such as Talḥah ibn ʿUbaydillah, al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and Saʿīd ibn Zayd, came forward, as did ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir and his parents Yāsir and Sumayyah. A small Muslim community thus came into existence. Although the advocacy of the new faith continued in secret, the Quraysh elders noticed that something was going on. However, they did not bother to look into this, as they assumed it could represent no danger to their established social order.

Three years later, the Prophet was instructed to make his message public and to call on people to accept it. As he was to prove throughout his career, he never shrank from the fulfilment of a duty. Therefore, he addressed his immediate Hāshim clan, and invited them for a meal. He compassionately appealed to them to accept Islam, as this would save them from the social ills that plagued their materialistic way of life and give them a future life to look forward to. He also addressed all the clans of the Quraysh, standing on al-Ṣafā hill, near the Kaʿbah, and made it clear to them that God had entrusted him with a message that was applicable to all mankind in all generations. In both cases, he was met with hostile reception, particularly from his uncle Abū Lahab.

The confrontation did not result in much trouble at the beginning; but soon the Makkan chiefs realized that the message of Islam was steadily gaining recruits from the people who belonged to their various clans. The message heralded a fundamental change to the social order that, at the time, gave the chiefs their privileges and kept the slaves, the poor and the weak at their mercy, as Islam advocated an equitable distribution of wealth. Most importantly, it threatened the religious authority that the Quraysh exercised over the entire Arabian Peninsula. The Quraysh elders could not take the Prophet personally to task, because he was protected by his clan, and the elders did not want a feud to occur within their community. They tried to negotiate some arrangements that would silence the message of Islam, but Muhammad would accept no compromise, and the negotiations broke down more than once. Every time

this occurred, the breakdown ushered in a period of persecution of the weaker elements, who became Muslims. The atmosphere in Makkah became much tenser: the threat of a bloody confrontation increased, as hardliners among the unbelievers became far more vocal, advocating the need to put an effective stop to the call to Islam. In 615 CE, two years after having gone public, the Prophet advised many of his followers to immigrate to Abyssinia, a country "ruled by a just king, where you may have a safe haven."[1]

A total of eighty-three men and nineteen women immigrated to Abyssinia, where they were given asylum by Negus, its king. These represented about half the Muslim community in Makkah at the time. This immigration is often described by Muslim (and other) historians as a flight from persecution. However, a careful look at the names of the immigrants and their standing with their clans shows that they were not the target of the Quraysh campaign of persecution. They belonged to the most distinguished families and clans in Makkah and enjoyed the full protection of their clans. Thus, they could not come to any physical harm. Rather, those who bore the brunt of that campaign of persecution stayed in Makkah. The immigration was indeed a strategic measure, aiming at establishing a new base for Islam, where it could be advocated among the local population without fear of any harm. Some of those immigrants stayed in Abyssinia, on the Prophet's orders, for fifteen years. They could have joined the Muslims in Madinah after the Prophet and his Companions settled there in 622 CE. Although some of them did, the more distinguished figures (including the Prophet's own cousin, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib) remained in Abyssinia until the Prophet finally recalled them in 629. When they returned, they brought with them a large delegation of Abyssinian Muslims, who visited Madinah and pledged loyalty to the Prophet.

This immigration to Abyssinia might have averted an immediate danger that might have engulfed the entire Muslim community in Makkah. The Makkan chiefs remained hostile to Islam. They were unwilling to listen to its message, and administered harsh treatment to its advocates. However, they no longer felt that Islam represented a threat to their established order. The Prophet understood that his message was addressed to all mankind, not merely the Makkan society. Hence, he needed to bring it to others. His immediate target was the rest of the Arabian tribes. This group was not difficult to reach, as Makkah was the centre of an annual pilgrimage, where contingents from all tribes came over to perform the pilgrimage rituals, to venerate the major idols and to offer worship at the Ka'bah. The pilgrimage had continued to be the focus of the life of the

[1] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 343.

people of Makkah ever since the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael built it many centuries earlier. However, the Quraysh had distorted most of its rituals and introduced some weird practices: such as walking around the Ka'bah naked. The presence of people from various tribes afforded an opportunity for the Prophet to address them and explain the message of Islam to them. Moreover, people came to Makkah at all times to visit the holy place and worship there. Some brought with them some goods to sell.

The Prophet sought to meet any visitor to Makkah and explain Islam to them. The idea of God's Oneness was generally acceptable to the Arabs, even though the concept of God had long been twisted and distorted. The idols they worshipped in addition to God did not have a clear status in the thinking of the Arabs: they thought of them as partners with God, or assistants to Him, and they assumed that the idols would bring people closer to God. Indeed, the very concept of God was blurred in their minds. He was distant and vague. Therefore, the clear Islamic concept of God's Oneness and the rejection of all partners appealed to many. However, there were some constraints that made most people hesitate or refrain from accepting Islam.

During the pilgrimage season, the Prophet went to the camps of different tribes and explained his message to them. Generally speaking, their response was hostile. The Quraysh mounted a counteroffensive, sending some of its most eloquent speakers to address the different tribes and warn them against listening to Muhammad. They made it clear that the Quraysh would consider any positive response to Islam as a hostile action and threatened military retaliation against any tribe that offered Muhammad such response. The Quraysh speakers also harped on the idea that had strong appeal in tribal society: that as Muhammad was the son of the Quraysh and they knew him well, they would have embraced his idea without hesitation, had it been any good. In the tribal system of Arabia, the tribe was always the benefactor of any of its sons or daughters who had something good to offer. If they stood solidly against someone, that person's chances of success were heavily curtailed. Therefore, most of those tribes were more willing to listen to the Quraysh speakers and take their advice, rather than listen to the Prophet.

Moreover, the Quraysh started an effective smear campaign against the Prophet himself, describing him as a liar, a poet, a madman and a sorcerer. When they realized that using so many descriptions had become counterproductive, they held a conference to agree on what to say to pilgrim delegations. The conference reviewed all these options, realizing that none held much credibility. Ultimately, they agreed to say that he was a "sorcerer who had come up with vague recitations that generated discord between man and wife, and between

this occurred, the breakdown ushered in a period of persecution of the weaker elements, who became Muslims. The atmosphere in Makkah became much tenser: the threat of a bloody confrontation increased, as hardliners among the unbelievers became far more vocal, advocating the need to put an effective stop to the call to Islam. In 615 CE, two years after having gone public, the Prophet advised many of his followers to immigrate to Abyssinia, a country "ruled by a just king, where you may have a safe haven."[1]

A total of eighty-three men and nineteen women immigrated to Abyssinia, where they were given asylum by Negus, its king. These represented about half the Muslim community in Makkah at the time. This immigration is often described by Muslim (and other) historians as a flight from persecution. However, a careful look at the names of the immigrants and their standing with their clans shows that they were not the target of the Quraysh campaign of persecution. They belonged to the most distinguished families and clans in Makkah and enjoyed the full protection of their clans. Thus, they could not come to any physical harm. Rather, those who bore the brunt of that campaign of persecution stayed in Makkah. The immigration was indeed a strategic measure, aiming at establishing a new base for Islam, where it could be advocated among the local population without fear of any harm. Some of those immigrants stayed in Abyssinia, on the Prophet's orders, for fifteen years. They could have joined the Muslims in Madinah after the Prophet and his Companions settled there in 622 CE. Although some of them did, the more distinguished figures (including the Prophet's own cousin, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib) remained in Abyssinia until the Prophet finally recalled them in 629. When they returned, they brought with them a large delegation of Abyssinian Muslims, who visited Madinah and pledged loyalty to the Prophet.

This immigration to Abyssinia might have averted an immediate danger that might have engulfed the entire Muslim community in Makkah. The Makkan chiefs remained hostile to Islam. They were unwilling to listen to its message, and administered harsh treatment to its advocates. However, they no longer felt that Islam represented a threat to their established order. The Prophet understood that his message was addressed to all mankind, not merely the Makkan society. Hence, he needed to bring it to others. His immediate target was the rest of the Arabian tribes. This group was not difficult to reach, as Makkah was the centre of an annual pilgrimage, where contingents from all tribes came over to perform the pilgrimage rituals, to venerate the major idols and to offer worship at the Ka'bah. The pilgrimage had continued to be the focus of the life of the

[1] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 343.

people of Makkah ever since the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael built it many centuries earlier. However, the Quraysh had distorted most of its rituals and introduced some weird practices: such as walking around the Ka'bah naked. The presence of people from various tribes afforded an opportunity for the Prophet to address them and explain the message of Islam to them. Moreover, people came to Makkah at all times to visit the holy place and worship there. Some brought with them some goods to sell.

The Prophet sought to meet any visitor to Makkah and explain Islam to them. The idea of God's Oneness was generally acceptable to the Arabs, even though the concept of God had long been twisted and distorted. The idols they worshipped in addition to God did not have a clear status in the thinking of the Arabs: they thought of them as partners with God, or assistants to Him, and they assumed that the idols would bring people closer to God. Indeed, the very concept of God was blurred in their minds. He was distant and vague. Therefore, the clear Islamic concept of God's Oneness and the rejection of all partners appealed to many. However, there were some constraints that made most people hesitate or refrain from accepting Islam.

During the pilgrimage season, the Prophet went to the camps of different tribes and explained his message to them. Generally speaking, their response was hostile. The Quraysh mounted a counteroffensive, sending some of its most eloquent speakers to address the different tribes and warn them against listening to Muhammad. They made it clear that the Quraysh would consider any positive response to Islam as a hostile action and threatened military retaliation against any tribe that offered Muhammad such response. The Quraysh speakers also harped on the idea that had strong appeal in tribal society: that as Muhammad was the son of the Quraysh and they knew him well, they would have embraced his idea without hesitation, had it been any good. In the tribal system of Arabia, the tribe was always the benefactor of any of its sons or daughters who had something good to offer. If they stood solidly against someone, that person's chances of success were heavily curtailed. Therefore, most of those tribes were more willing to listen to the Quraysh speakers and take their advice, rather than listen to the Prophet.

Moreover, the Quraysh started an effective smear campaign against the Prophet himself, describing him as a liar, a poet, a madman and a sorcerer. When they realized that using so many descriptions had become counterproductive, they held a conference to agree on what to say to pilgrim delegations. The conference reviewed all these options, realizing that none held much credibility. Ultimately, they agreed to say that he was a "sorcerer who had come up with vague recitations that generated discord between man and wife, and between

brothers within the same family." Most tribes listened to these arguments by the Quraysh and wanted nothing to do with the Prophet. They felt that they had more interests with the Quraysh than with an individual whose claims to receive revelations from on high could not be proven. Although some tribes were willing to listen to him, and were impressed with the superb beauty of the Qur'ān as he recited its passages and with the values it preached, they were unwilling to commit themselves, as they felt that they could be taking on something bigger than they could cope with.

Nevertheless, the Prophet continued to use the pilgrimage season as a platform to address the Arab people. He was certain that his message was a true message from God and it was to ultimately triumph. He was encouraged by the fact that individual converts continued to trickle in. No matter what verbal abuse the Quraysh hurled against him and his message, he continued to preach it undeterred. However, it was extremely painful to him to see the weaker elements among his followers being subjected to torture and physical pressure in attempts to turn them away from Islam. Indeed, some of those who belonged to higher families were imprisoned and tortured by their own families.

This overall situation continued to deteriorate. The hardliners among the Quraysh had been able to wrestle the initiative and impose biting sanctions on the Muslim community, and they wanted to expand this. They managed to carry the entire Quraysh with them in imposing a total economic and social boycott against the Hāshimite clan. They wrote down terms that specified that no one in the Quraysh would have any commercial dealings with any Hāshimite, not even selling them food, and that no marriage with them would be agreed upon until they handed Muhammad to the Quraysh to kill. The Hāshimites would not agree to such humiliation, and both the Muslims and the unbelievers among them endured the boycott with fortitude. Not everybody in the Quraysh were happy with the boycott, but they had to go ahead with it so as not to breach the traditions of their tribal society. Hence, the boycott lasted three years, until five people from different clans of the Quraysh successfully plotted its abrogation.

The ninth year of the Prophet's mission was approaching its end when the boycott was ended. However, there was no sign that the Quraysh would moderate its stance of opposition to Islam. Abū Ṭālib continued to protect the Prophet, although he decided not to become a Muslim. However, Abū Ṭālib had reached old age, and a few months later he became ill. A number of the chiefs of the clans went to him, requesting him to negotiate some accommodation between them and the Prophet. The Prophet insisted that he could not change God's message: they had to believe in God's Oneness and that Muhammad was God's Messenger. This was the last attempt at any sort of accommodation. Soon

afterwards, Abū Ṭālib died, and a few weeks later, Khadījah also died. Thus, the Prophet was deprived of the care and support he received from his uncle in his public life and from his wife at home. The situation was becoming even more difficult for him.

The Prophet thought of taking his message to new areas. He travelled to Taif, a mountainous town approximately forty-five miles away, where the major tribe of Thaqīf lived. He spoke to its chiefs and to the public, but he experienced a very hostile reception. The chiefs of the Thaqīf set their slaves to chase him out of their town, and they hurled stones and other objects against him, so that his feet were bleeding as he finally took refuge in a garden belonging to two brothers, ʿUtbah and Shaybah, who were chiefs of the ʿAbd Shams clan of Quraysh. These brothers were unbelievers, but they were sympathetic to their tribesman, sending him a plate of grapes with a slave of theirs. When the chase was over, the Prophet moved away from Taif, returning to Makkah, but he felt he could not enter the city unprotected. He sent word to some of its chiefs, and al-Muṭʿim ibn ʿAdiyy, a distant uncle, provided him with protected entry. Before reaching Makkah, the Prophet sat down to reflect on his situation. He appealed most passionately for God's support:

> To You, My Lord, I complain of my weakness, lack of support and the humiliation I am made to receive.
>
> Most Compassionate and Merciful! You are the Lord of the weak, and You are my Lord. To whom do You leave me? To a distant person who receives me with hostility? Or to an enemy to whom You have given power over me?
>
> If You are not displeased with me, I do not care what I face. I would, however, be much happier with Your mercy.
>
> I seek refuge in the light of Your face by which all darkness is dispelled and both this life and the life to come are put on their right courses against incurring Your wrath or being the subject of Your anger. To You I submit, until I earn Your pleasure. Everything is powerless without Your support.[2]

At that point, the angel Gabriel came to tell him that God had granted his appeal: "Here with me is the angel in charge of mountains to take your

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 28. Also, Al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-Zawā'id*, vol. 6, p. 35.

instructions." The angel of the mountains greeted him and said: "I am at your service. If you wish I can close the two mountains over their valley." The Prophet said: "No. I hope that there will be among their offspring people who worship God alone, associating no partners with Him." Some years later, the Prophet remarked that this episode of the trip to Taif was the hardest he had ever to face.

Back home in Makkah, the Quraysh felt that Muhammad was now vulnerable to their abuse. They compounded verbal abuse with physical assault by throwing dirt on him while he was engaged in his worship in the Grand Mosque. They challenged him with absurd demands. They stopped at nothing in trying to hurt him.

The year 620 was to witness the beginning of a transformation in the fortunes of Islam and its Prophet. First, he was taken on a night journey, when the angel Gabriel came to him, bringing a heavenly steed that travelled at high speed. Gabriel took the Prophet to Jerusalem, where he met all the earlier Prophets, including Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. He led a congregational prayer, and they all joined in. This was a symbol of the unity of God's messages, brought to their fullness by the message of the Qur'ān. From Jerusalem, the angel took him up to heaven, where he was shown some of what those who are destined to hell will suffer and the great rewards for those who will be admitted to heaven. The prayer duty was amended to five prayers each day for all Muslims, throughout the year. The Prophet was then brought back to Makkah. This all happened within a few hours, and he returned at the time of the dawn prayer.

Some Muslim scholars maintain that this was a spiritual journey, and others say that it was all a very vivid dream. There is no need to say that this journey did not actually occur, because God is certainly able to accomplish whatever He wills. If he decides to take the Prophet, or anyone else, on a miraculous journey, He does so. This is just as easy for God as sending rain or wind, or making the earth suitable for human life, or giving a child the faculties of hearing and speech. People may say that these are natural laws, but it is God who has made them and set them in operation. The miraculous only seems so because it is unfamiliar to us. In fact, every aspect of life is a miracle and everything in the universe is miraculous: these things are all easy for God.

The Prophet's willingness to report his night journey, given his hostile audience, was a mark of his strengthened and well-founded confidence in the truth of his message. He continued to preach with fresh zeal. By the time the next pilgrimage season approached, the Prophet was more determined than ever to carry his message to people outside Makkah, despite the growing difficulties he was facing. The pilgrimage season of 620 brought him a breath of hope and

fresh air, as he met six pilgrims from Yathrib (later to be called Madinah). The Arab community in Yathrib was largely a farming community, and they lived side by side with a large Jewish community. The Jews used to boast of their monotheistic religion, telling the Arabs that they anticipated the emergence of a new Prophet who would be permitted to fight and use arms against his opponents. When trouble emerged between Arabs and Jews, the latter would threaten the Arabs, saying that they would follow the new Prophet and cause the Arabs to suffer a crushing defeat. Those six Arabs from Yathrib sat with the Prophet and listened to his exposition of his message and to his recitation of the Qur'ān. They were highly impressed and declared their acceptance of Islam. The Arabs of Yathrib belonged to two main tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, who were often in war with each other. Those six told the Prophet: "We have left our people in a terrible state of division and enmity. If God brings about their unity through you, no one will be more honourable than you." They promised to explain their new faith to their fellow tribesmen and to meet the Prophet again in the next pilgrimage season.

They kept their promise, bringing with them six others. In this second meeting, all twelve pledged themselves as firm believers in Islam. The terms of the pledge were: "We believe in God and associate no partner with Him. We shall not steal, commit adultery, kill our children, assert a falsehood with regard to the parenthood of our children, or disobey the Prophet in anything reasonable." In this meeting, there was a discussion of the needs of the new Muslim community in Yathrib. The Prophet sent one of his most learned Companions, Muṣ'ab ibn Umayr, with them to teach new Muslims the principles of Islam and the Qur'ān. Muṣ'ab was also to organize the efforts of advocacy of Islam among the people of Yathrib. His mission was very successful, and Islam spread rapidly in Yathrib, with whole clans converting to the new faith. On his return to Makkah ten months later, Muṣ'ab reported to the Prophet that the city offered a good base for Islam.

The pilgrimage season of the following year (622 CE), which was the thirteenth since the start of Islam, witnessed an unprecedented step in Arabia. The Prophet met with seventy-three men and two women from Yathrib, who were all Muslims. They were part of the pilgrimage contingent from the city. Under the cover of the night, they came out stealthily from their camp in Mina to meet the Prophet. They pledged to support him and declared themselves ready to make whatever sacrifices they would need to make. They asserted that they would fight anyone who would oppose him, and that they welcomed all Muslims in Makkah to come over to Yathrib, where they would share with them all they have. They agreed that together they would form a community

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separate from others, with the bond of Islam making them all a single nation (an *ummah*). Their only condition was that this new alliance would come into force once the Prophet had arrived in Yathrib.

Over the next three months all Muslims who could do so immigrated from Makkah to Yathrib. They travelled in small groups, taking with them only some small items they could carry. They abandoned their homes and businesses, and deserted their clans. Only those who were physically prevented from travelling stayed behind. The Prophet remained in Makkah with Abū Bakr and ʿAlī, his cousin, until he received instructions to travel. In the meantime, the Quraysh realized what was going on and feared the worst. In an emergency meeting, the chiefs of the clans considered all options and decided to move immediately to kill the Prophet. The plot was to choose a brave young man from each clan so as to share in the responsibility for the assassination. This method was agreed upon so that the Hāshimites would realize that they could not fight the rest of the Quraysh on their own. They would then accept blood money in compensation.

The Prophet managed to escape his would-be assassins and took every precaution to mislead them. He arrived in Madinah after two weeks, where he received a very warm welcome. He immediately set about organizing his new community, which consisted of the Muhājirūn (the immigrants from Makkah), and the Anṣār (the supporters who were the Muslims from Yathrib, which was henceforth called God's Messenger's city, or Madinah for short). The Prophet took four measures of great importance:

1. He built a mosque to serve as a place of worship, a school where Muslims learnt the details of their faith, a meeting place, and a government headquarters.
2. He established a strong bond of brotherhood between the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, making one of each group a brother of one of the other group. This brotherhood was considered to be so important that it superseded the tribal bond.
3. He drew a covenant with the other groups in Madinah, namely the Jews and the Arab unbelievers, making them all citizens of the new state that he established in the city. This was a detailed document specifying duties and commitments of each group. This was the first written constitution in human history, establishing a pluralist society based on citizenship.

He sent out several armed expeditions into the areas surrounding Madinah, so as to demonstrate that the new state did not fear anyone. The Arabian

society was used to tribal raids that were launched for easy gain. The Prophet wanted to show that Madinah was too strong for anyone to contemplate such an attack. Moreover, the expeditions threatened the trade route of the caravans of the Quraysh, without actually engaging in any fighting: except once resulting in a small clash between a group of six Muslims and a small caravan. These expeditions were formed of the Muhājirūn only.

The new society in Madinah was discovering vistas of life that the people had never encountered. The treatment of other people as brothers and sisters in faith, rather than blood relations and tribesmen, gave all Muslims a new meaning of life. Having a cause to work for also added a new dimension to their outlook. As advocates of Islam, they brought its message to their relatives and fellow citizens. For the first time, the Muslims could conduct their lives according to Islamic teachings without fear. More people were embracing the faith every day. The Prophet continued his efforts of moulding the new community, smoothing its rough edges and consolidating the fledgling Islamic state. However, this state of affairs could not last long, as the Quraysh represented a serious threat and had managed to reassert its position as the leading force in Arabia. If Islam was to move beyond Madinah, it had to neutralize the threat of the Quraysh.

From another point of view, the Muslim community lived in poverty: the influx of the Muhājirūn placed a heavy burden on the economy of the city, and the Quraysh had confiscated all the possessions that they left behind. Therefore, the Prophet was looking for an opportunity to redress this imbalance.

Such an opportunity offered itself in Ramadan of the second year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah (year two in the Islamic calendar, which starts with the Prophet's immigration to Madinah). The Prophet received intelligence that a large trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh was on its way back from Syria to Makkah. He called on Muslims to move quickly to intercept it. A force of 313 men, most of them from the Anṣār, marched with the Prophet to intercept the caravan. The Prophet did not order a full mobilization, because that would have taken time, and the caravan might be then difficult to chase. Moreover, the Muslim force was ill equipped for a major fight. Abū Sufyān, the leader of the caravan, was moving wearily when he came parallel with Madinah. He soon heard that a Muslim force was out to intercept his caravan. He took two actions in response: he moved towards the sea to march by the seaside route, and he sent information to Makkah, urging its people to come to his defence. A well-equipped army of 1000 fighters moved fast to defend the caravan, which was able to slip away and escape its Muslim pursuers.

The two forces met at Badr. Although the Prophet had tried to avoid an armed clash, the hardliners in the Quraysh army thought they should not miss

such a chance of defeating the Muslims in battle. However, the Muslims were able to score a resounding victory. Many of the chiefs of Quraysh's clans were among seventy of their soldiers killed in battle, and a similar number were taken prisoners. The Muslim losses were fourteen martyrs. There was some discussion about the fate of the prisoners of war. Some of the Prophet's Companions were in favour of killing them in order to demonstrate to the whole of Arabia that the Muslim community was uncompromising toward unbelievers. The Prophet, however, decided to let them go against the payment of ransom. Those who had no money, but were literate, were given their freedom in return for teaching ten Muslim children to read and write.

Over the next few years a number of momentous events occurred, with enemies of Islam resorting to various methods of confrontation. First, the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqāʿ in Madinah violated the treaty that the Prophet made with all Jewish tribes in the city, as well as with the Arab unbelievers. After the Muslims besieged them, the tribe agreed to leave Madinah and find another place.

Then, it was the turn of the Quraysh to launch an attack on Madinah. One year after the Battle of Badr, a 3000-strong army marched at speed, aiming to take the Muslims by surprise. The Muslim fighting force numbered only 700. A battle was fought, in which the Muslims initially gained the upper hand; however a battalion positioned on a hill to the rear deserted their position, thinking that the battle was over and victory was assured. This enabled two units of the Quraysh army to launch a counterattack from behind. The Muslim army was thus besieged. A number of the Quraysh fighters had vowed to kill the Prophet, and when the Muslim troops were in chaos as a result of the attack from their rear, those fighters launched a determined attack against him. They injured him and broke his teeth, however, he was defended by a small number of his dedicated Companions and the attack against him was repulsed. This clash, known as the Battle of Uḥud, ended in a military defeat for the Muslims, who lost seventy martyrs (ten percent of their fighting force).

This battle revealed the existence of hypocrites in Madinah. These were people who pretended to be Muslims, but did not really believe in Islam. Their leader, ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy, was able to cause a split in the Muslim ranks before the battle, taking with him no less than 300 men who had initially marched with the army. This reduced the Muslim army to around 700 soldiers, who were left to face a force that was four times their number. The pretext offered by the deserters was absurd, and the Qur'ān quotes their argument: "Had we known there would be a fight, we would certainly have followed you." (3: 167)

Arguably, in any state based on a coherent set of principles and an ideology, there will always be some people who stand against the system. If their

opposition is openly expressed, there is little problem for society. However, where this opposition engages in secret plots to undermine the system, problems arise. When the Prophet established the first Muslim state in Madinah, those of its Arab population who did not accept Islam were of two types: the first were those who continued to reject Islam, making no secret of their stand. No problem was ever recorded with them, either as individuals or as a group. They were large in number initially, but many of them in time decided to embrace Islam, as they began to realize the truth of its message. The second group included those who realized that Islam was gaining in strength and that unless they joined its ranks they would be cut off by their people. Yet, they had no interest in becoming Muslims. Therefore, they pretended to accept Islam, but did not believe in it in reality. These were the hypocrites, and they were to cause the Muslim community significant problems.

The Muslim defeat in the Battle of Uḥud encouraged some tribes to resort to trickery in order to score some success against the Muslim state. Two specific events caused the Prophet and the Muslim community much distress. The first, known as al-Rajīʿ, involved people coming to the Prophet requesting him to send a few of his Companions with them to teach their Muslim people the Qur'ān. He sent six of his Companions, but the group attacked them on the way and killed four of them. Then they sold the other two to the Quraysh, where they were killed in revenge for the soldiers who were killed at Badr. The second involved between forty and seventy Muslims, who were well-versed in the Qur'ān. They travelled to Najd to advocate Islam, after the Prophet had received assurances that they would be under the protection of the local chiefs. However, they were entrapped and killed.

The home front was not always easy for the Muslim state. The next group to pose a problem was the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍīr. They were party to the convention established by the Prophet after his arrival in Madinah, which committed them to certain duties of citizenship. The Prophet wanted to test their commitment to these duties. He went to their quarters with three of his trusted Companions. He asked them for help in the payment of the blood money of two men a Muslim man had killed by mistake. They agreed to help, requesting the Muslim group to sit down while they raised the money. However, they tried to assassinate the Prophet while he sat waiting. The angel Gabriel informed the Prophet of the plot, and he immediately left on his own and headed towards his mosque. He then sent them notice to evacuate the city. He offered for them to take what they wished of their possessions and to appoint agents to manage their farmland. At first they agreed, but then they received word from ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy, the chief hypocrite, promising full support: he

even vowed to fight alongside them if the matter came to a battle. Therefore, they rejected the Prophet's offer. The Prophet laid siege to their forts. As the siege began to take its toll, and they realized that no one would actually come to their support, they agreed to evacuate the city, accepting terms that were much worse than those the Prophet had initially offered. They had to relinquish their farmland, although they destroyed their homes so that the Muslims would not benefit from them.

The success against al-Naḍīr did not prevent some Arabian tribes from trying their luck against the Muslim state. A tribe called al-Muṣṭalaq thought that they could attack Madinah and make easy gains, particularly after the setbacks it suffered. However, the Prophet employed a highly successful tactic, making use of the element of surprise. When he received intelligence of an impending attack, he moved very quickly to neutralize the threat. The Prophet's tactics never included a surprise attack on any people. Rather, he used surprise to make his presence in force felt so that the enemy would realize that resistance was useless. That would achieve much better results for the Muslims, at little or no cost. This is the approach he adopted for the Muṣṭalaq threat. The Muslims were totally unexpected when they actually appeared at the wells of the Muṣṭalaq tribe. A short battle ensued, before the Muṣṭalaq surrendered, having lost ten of their men.

All these engagements and the victories scored by the Muslim community still did not allow the Muslim state in Madinah to live in peace. They had powerful enemies all over Arabia, who were not prepared to listen to the message of Islam. Even Arabian tribes that lived in remote areas and did not feel concerned with the conflict between the Quraysh and Islam preferred to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. They continued to look at the situation as a conflict between the Quraysh and one of its sons. Those who were actively hostile to Islam began to feel that they must join forces in order to stand any chance of victory. Therefore, an alliance was forged between the Quraysh, the major Arabian tribe of Ghaṭafān, and the Jews. They raised an army of 10,000, which was the largest ever seen in Arabia, and marched towards Madinah, having solemnly pledged to each other that they would exterminate Islam and the Muslim community.

Madinah was vulnerable to attack only from the north. To the east and west of the city there were two wide stretched areas of volcanic rocks that were too difficult for any enemy to traverse. To the south were the date farms of the Anṣār and the forts of the Jewish tribe of Qurayẓah, which were bound by a treaty with the Muslims. The Prophet ordered that a moat should be dug at the northern entrance to Madinah, which should be wide and deep enough to stop the invading army. This was done very quickly, with all Muslims, including the

Prophet himself, sharing in the digging and the removal of the dust and stones. By the time the attacking army arrived, the moat was completed and Madinah was well fortified. The attackers could only lay a siege, hoping for the morale of the defenders to collapse.

The first couple of weeks of the siege showed no weakening in the Muslim ranks. The mastermind behind the forging of the alliance, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab (the chief rabbi of the Naḍīr Jews who were evacuated from Madinah eighteen months earlier), worked hard to bring his objective to fulfilment. He went to the Qurayẓah Jews and succeeded in persuading them to join the alliance and to attack the Muslims from the rear: thus, the Muslims would be fighting on two fronts. On learning this, the Muslims responded to the Prophet's call to show total reliance on God and to place their unwavering trust in Him. Before the Qurayẓah Jews were ready to launch their attack, God sent a violent storm over the area where the allied forces were encamped. This demoralized the unbelievers, as their supplies were already running very low, after having laid siege to Madinah for twenty-seven days. Therefore, the commander of the Quraysh forces, Abū Sufyān, gave orders to withdraw. The Ghaṭafān followed suit. In the morning, the Muslims looked across the moat they had dug and found that the enemy had disappeared.

That left the Qurayẓah Jews, with whom relations had collapsed and no trust could be re-established. The Muslims laid siege to them in their forts. After twenty-five days of siege, they surrendered, accepting whatever verdict could be passed on them. The Prophet allowed them to choose their judge from among his Companions. They chose Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, who was their ally before Islam. Sa'd's verdict sentenced the combatants among them to death. Around twenty people were thus executed, including Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, the forger of the alliance that had aimed to annihilate Islam and the Muslims.

This left the Muslim state in a much stronger position. The Prophet remarked that the Muslims could now be on the offensive. However, this was not among his priorities. He was certainly ready to meet any threat from any quarters, but he never sought to subdue any tribe or community by force. He would have loved to see all people consider his message and make an informed decision on whether to accept it or not, but he would not force it on anyone, as he considered that to convert people by force would be entirely alien to the nature of Islam. The end of the encounter with the allied forces of unbelievers ushered in a period of relative peace for the Muslim state, which the Prophet used to consolidate the basis of the Islamic society he had established in Madinah. The bond of brotherhood that prevailed in that society was stronger than any that can be seen in any state functioning under any system or ideology. With this

internal consolidation, the Muslim state was quietly acquiring greater strength. Therefore, it was with great enthusiasm that the Prophet announced that they would visit Makkah to perform the mini-pilgrimage (i.e. the *ʿUmrah*) and worship at the Kaʿbah.

The Prophet marched at the head of 1400 of his Companions carrying no arms other than swords in their sheaths, which was the essential type of arms for a traveller in the desert. They took with them a large number of animals to sacrifice at the Kaʿbah, as part of their religious rituals. The Quraysh were greatly agitated at the news. They needed to take a decision on whether to allow the Muslims to proceed and come into Makkah or to prevent them, even if it led to a battle. Their dilemma was that as custodians of the Kaʿbah (a shrine revered by all Arabs) they were committed to allowing anyone to visit for worship. Besides this, the Muslims timed their march in the middle of the sacred months when all fighting was prohibited. This was an Arabian tradition based on the faith of the Prophet Abraham. On the other hand, if they let the Muslims come in and worship, this would be seen throughout Arabia as tilting the balance of power much further in favour of the Muslims. After much debate, they decided to deny the Muslims entry into Makkah, regardless of the consequences. They despatched an advance force to a position outside Makkah to engage the Muslims should they try to force their entry. Should fighting ensue, they would be ready with their reinforcements. Receiving intelligence of that, the Prophet took a circuitous route to avoid meeting the Quraysh advance force. However, when he reached al-Ḥudaybiyah his she-camel sat down and would not move. No matter how his Companions tried to get the she-camel to rise, she would not. The Prophet realized that this was a sign to seek some peaceful arrangements with the Quraysh. He declared to his Companions that he would agree to whatever the Quraysh were prepared to offer in order to avoid bloodshed.

The Quraysh sent several emissaries to demand that the Muslims should go back. Each one of them returned with the advice to let the Muslims visit, as they intended no harm. The Quraysh rejected all such advice. The Prophet then sent them his Companion, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, to reassure them of the Muslims' intentions. ʿUthmān was detained too long in Makkah, and a rumour circulated that he was killed by the Quraysh. At this point, the Prophet took a pledge from all his Companions to fight to the finish. The Quraysh realized that they acted wrongly when they detained ʿUthmān, so they released him and followed that by sending Suhayl ibn ʿAmr to negotiate an agreement. Suhayl behaved in a haughty manner, trying to impose harsh conditions. However, the Prophet was very easy in his approach, agreeing to all conditions demanded by the Quraysh. His attitude immensely surprised his Companions, particularly because he did

not consult any of them, which was contrary to his usual practice. The reason was that he acted on God's instructions. The terms of the agreement were:

- Both parties have agreed to a complete truce for a period of ten years, during which all people will enjoy peace and security and will not attack one another.
- Moreover, if anyone from the Quraysh joins Muhammad without permission from his guardian or chief, he shall be returned to the Quraysh.
- If anyone from those in the camp of Muhammad joins the Quraysh, they are not required to return him.
- Both sides agree that they harbour good intentions towards each other.
- No theft or treachery shall be condoned.
- Whoever wishes to enter into an alliance with Muhammad may do so, and whoever wants to enter into an alliance with the Quraysh may do so.
- It is further agreed that you, Muhammad, shall return home this year without entering Makkah. At the end of one year, we shall evacuate Makkah for you so that you may enter it with your followers to stay for three days only. You shall carry only the armament necessary for a traveller – namely, your swords in their sheaths. You shall not carry any other arms.

When these terms were agreed upon, two things occurred that were to have important effects. Firstly, the tribe of Bakr declared its alliance with the Quraysh, and the tribe of Khuzāʿah declared its alliance with the Prophet. The second was the arrival of Abū Jandal, Suhayl's own son, who was a Muslim and jailed by his father. He had managed to escape from jail and hoped to join the Muslims. Suhayl demanded his immediate return. The Prophet appealed to Suhayl to grant Abū Jandal his freedom, but Suhayl refused. The Prophet explained to Abū Jandal that honouring their commitments was characteristic of the Muslims in all situations. Hence, he was handed back to his father. The Muslims returned to Madinah without completing their rituals. They were highly disturbed, but the Prophet reassured them that the results would soon be in their favour.

The Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement was concluded in the final few weeks of the sixth year of the Prophet's Hijrah (his immigration to Madinah), 628 CE. This was a turning point in the fortunes of the Islamic message and the Muslim state. However, in order to take events in their chronological order, we need to speak first of the Battle of Khaybar. Khaybar is a city to the north

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west of Madinah, and it was inhabited by an entirely Jewish population. This city was constructed as a series of forts, and was surrounded by a large area of farmland, with a variety of crops and plenty of date trees. When the Jewish tribes of Madinah were evacuated after they had violated their covenant with the Muslim state, many of them moved to Khaybar, while some went to Syria and other places. In Khaybar, the Jews were agitating for revenge against the Muslims, particularly after the evacuation of the Qurayẓah tribe, as this left only a few small tribes of Jews in Madinah. They felt that had the allied forces been more determined, they would have achieved the victory they aimed for, and put an end to Islam. The Jews of Khaybar therefore renewed their alliance with the Ghaṭafān tribe, who was party to the original alliance. When the Prophet received intelligence of the new grouping he sent a delegation to Khaybar to persuade the Jews that they would be ill advised to try to take on the Muslim state. However, the mission was unsuccessful. Therefore, the Prophet ordered his 1400 Companions who were with him at al-Ḥudaybiyah to mobilize. He aimed for Khaybar, taking precautions not to alert the Jews there.

The Jews were surprised to see the Muslim army at their doorstep. They went into their forts, which were well supplied. The Prophet tried to avoid fighting, but the Jews were unwilling to come to an agreement and a battle ensued. This was a difficult situation, as the Muslims had to besiege one fort and take it before they moved to the next. The victory was total, and eventually the Jews surrendered, agreeing to evacuate the city and go elsewhere. However, after a few days they came up with an offer to remain and attend to the farms, taking half their produce, while the Muslims took the other half. The Prophet agreed to this, on condition that the Muslims could evacuate them whenever they wished. The Prophet then made similar agreements with several other Jewish communities in northern Arabia. These agreements were entered into peacefully, with no fighting. The Prophet never wanted to fight anyone; although when war was the other party's intention, he never shrank from engagement.

When the Battle of Khaybar was over, the Prophet received his cousin, Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, who had just returned from Abyssinia with the last of those Muslims who had travelled there fifteen years earlier. They returned after the Prophet sent a letter to Negus to repatriate them after their mission was over. They brought with them a large delegation of Abyssinian Muslims.

With the neutralization of the major threats, the Prophet could now press ahead with his main task. He was God's Messenger to all mankind, and it was part of his mission to make the Divine message known to all nations. After the events of Khaybar, he felt he should attend to this task. He chose a number of his Companions who combined the right temperament with courage, wisdom

and resourcefulness. He sent them with messages to the heads of neighbouring states, including the Emperors of Persia and Byzantium as well as the rulers of Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and Abyssinia. He called on these leaders to accept Islam and to allow their people to listen to the Divine message. The two most hostile responses were from the governor of Syria, who killed the Prophet's emissary, and the Persian Emperor, who tore up the Prophet's letter and sent a warrant for his arrest. The Byzantine Emperor sent a friendly response, and the Egyptian ruler sent a gift with his friendly response. Both recognized that a final message from God was promised, but they feared that they would lose their power if they were to accept Islam. Only the Negus of Abyssinia and the ruler of Bahrain accepted Islam. These letters might have not produced an immediate favourable result, but they certainly made Islam known in vast areas of the old world: across Asia, Europe and Africa, the three continents known at the time. Moreover, these letters were a prelude to what the future would bring. Islam moved into vast areas of all these countries, but this had to wait until the Prophet's successors started to mount their campaigns.

The seventh year of the Islamic calendar also witnessed a great deal of activity in the advocacy of Islam among the Arabian tribes. The Prophet's Companions could now move in peace to visit tribes across Arabia. Muslim historians tell us that in the two years that followed the peace agreement of al-Ḥudaybiyah, almost everyone with a clear mind who was approached with the Islamic message gave a positive response. This was manifested in the fact that the number of people who went with the Prophet when he concluded the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement and then on the Khaybar campaign were only 1400; whereas two years later, an army of 10,000 traversed the desert with him.

Another significant development which started a short while after the Ḥudaybiyah agreement, but had progressive consequences, was the arrival in Madinah of Abū Buṣayr, an ordinary tribesman from the Quraysh. He declared himself a Muslim and wanted to join the Muslim community. However, his clan sent a messenger for his extradition, as the agreement allowed. The Prophet had no option but to honour the agreement. Abū Buṣayr went back with the man (and his servant) who the Quraysh had sent to ask for the extradition. On the way, he managed to get hold of his captor's sword and kill him. Abū Buṣayr did not harm the servant, but the servant fled to Madinah and reported what happened to the Prophet. As Abū Buṣayr could neither join the Muslim community nor return to Makkah, he fled into the desert, but stayed close to the route of the Quraysh's trade caravans. He began to raid these caravans and cause them problems. Soon after, he was joined by a number of Muslims who fled Makkah. These formed a brigade that attacked the trade caravans, to the

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great dismay of the Quraysh. Within a short period, the chiefs of the Quraysh appealed to the Prophet to take them. They thus abandoned the condition in the peace agreement that required the Prophet to hand back any Muslim who came from Makkah to join him.

In the tenth month of that year, the Prophet and his Companions were due to visit Makkah for the mini-pilgrimage, as agreed with the Quraysh in the Ḥudaybiyah peace treaty. The Prophet and his Companions went ahead, taking with them their sacrificial animals. However, they took some armaments as a precaution. According to the agreement, they should have no arms other than their individual swords, however the Prophet feared a situation of treachery. He therefore took other armaments, keeping them at some distance from Makkah with a contingent of 200 of his Companions. These delayed their worship at the Kaʿbah until the others completed their worship and came over to relieve them. When the Prophet entered Makkah with his Companions and began his worship, the people of Makkah were in different minds. The chiefs, who were hardened against Islam, withdrew to some mountain areas in order not to witness what was happening. The majority of the population, however, were keen to see the Muslims. They were profoundly impressed by what they saw. They found that despite their different tribes and clans, the Muslims were a closely-knit unit. Moreover, their love of the Prophet was apparent and highly impressive. Every single Muslim was always ready to do as the Prophet bid and would do this with pleasure. When the Muslims talked to the people of Makkah, they were very friendly. They would tell them about the changes that Islam had brought into their lives. Moreover, many of the Muhājirūn met their families and talked to them, encouraging them to look at Islam in an objective light. The chiefs of Makkah felt that the Muslims' visit threatened to remove the barriers that they had assiduously tried to maintain in order to keep their people from embracing Islam. Therefore, when the agreed three days of the visit were over, they asked the Prophet to leave with his Companions. He requested them to reconsider, offering to give the people of Makkah a banquet, but they rejected his offer out of hand and asked him to leave. As always, the Prophet did not go back on a promise. Therefore, he ordered his Companions to depart.

That which the chiefs of Makkah feared most thus actually started to happen: many people of all classes of the Makkan society began to have second thoughts about Islam. These people felt that the concept of God, the Creator of the universe who has no partners, was superior to that of their own beliefs. Within a few weeks of the Prophet's visit, three of the young chiefs of Makkah were on their way to Madinah where they met the Prophet to declare themselves Muslims. These were Khālid ibn al-Walīd, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, and ʿUthmān ibn Ṭalḥah.

When the ruler of Syria, an Arab of the tribe of Ghassān but appointed by the Byzantine Emperor, killed the Prophet's emissary, his action constituted a huge affront to the Prophet and the Muslim state, and he could not be allowed to get away with it. Therefore, in the fifth month of year eight after the Hijrah, the Prophet sent a force of 3000 of his Companions to fight the ruler of Syria. He appointed three of his closest Companions (two from the Muhājirūn and one from the Anṣār) as commanders, with one to take over from the other should he be killed. The Prophet instructed them not to kill any elderly person, woman, child or monk, and not to cut a tree or kill an animal except for food. The army marched on its mission. When the Ghassānī ruler received intelligence of the approaching army, he raised a large army of 100,000 people. The Emperor further sent him a large number of reinforcements.

When the two forces met close to Mu'tah, a town in southern Jordan, the Muslim army was heavily outnumbered, and there was no way it could score a victory. Indeed, the three commanders were killed, one after the other, as the enemy concentrated its attack on the centre of the army. After the third commander was killed, the Muslims chose a new commander as instructed by the Prophet. Their choice was Khālid ibn al-Walīd who only recently embraced Islam, but was a talented military commander. Khālid realized that should the battle carry on to a decisive end, a large number of Muslims might be killed, and a victory was beyond them. Therefore, he came up with an ingenious plan. During the night after the first day's fighting, he switched the positions of his units and gave the enemy an impression that the Muslims were reinforced with new units. When the two armies re-engaged, the central units of his army slowly retreated while the other units continued to fight fiercely. He managed to switch the pressure on his units so that they could retreat slowly. The enemy thought that the Muslims were trying to drag them towards the desert where they were not used to fight. Therefore, they decided not to fall for the trick and did not pursue the retreating Muslim army. Thus Khālid was able to save most of his soldiers. The Prophet commended this action.

The Ḥudaybiyah peace treaty allowed any Arabian tribe to be in alliance with either party to the treaty. The tribe of Bakr joined the Quraysh in alliance, while Khuzāʿah allied itself with the Prophet. These two tribes had old feuds dating back to pre-Islamic days and Bakr continued to nurse old wounds from the killing a few of their men by the Khuzāʿah. Now they sought to take revenge. A force from Bakr, supported by a number of the Quraysh nobility, launched a night raid against Khuzāʿah and killed twenty of their people. In response, the Khuzāʿah sent a delegation to Madinah, reporting the attack to the Prophet

and appealing to him for support. The Prophet considered this attack a flagrant breach of the treaty and pledged his support.

In Makkah, the Quraysh recognized that their action was totally unwarranted and that they needed to take speedy action in order to avoid retaliatory action by the Muslims. Therefore, their leader, Abū Sufyān, travelled to Madinah on a mission of appeasement. However, the Prophet did not accept his apology and the leading Companions of the Prophet told Abū Sufyān frankly that they would only do what the Prophet bid them, and would not take action on their own initiative in such a matter of state. Thus he went back home having totally failed to achieve his purpose.

The Prophet then ordered mobilization, but he ensured that the Quraysh remained unaware of his plans. He sent a request to all tribes that had recently become Muslim to join his army, and they all sent strong contingents. The Muslim army was the largest ever, close to 10,000. This army moved quietly, without being detected, until it reached a place called Marr al-Ẓahrān, which is close to Makkah. The Prophet's tactic now was to psychologically overwhelm the Quraysh. He therefore ordered that his army light as many fires as possible during the night. As a result, when Abū Sufyān and a couple of the elders of Makkah went out looking for news they saw the fires and were perturbed. Soon they met al-ʿAbbās, the Prophet's uncle, who had been looking for someone to carry a message to the Quraysh. He wanted them to come over and negotiate peace with the Prophet. Al-ʿAbbās took Abū Sufyān to the Prophet. After a hard discussion, Abū Sufyān declared himself a Muslim. The Prophet offered for the people of Makkah to stay indoors, or in the mosque, or in Abū Sufyān's home, so that they would not be harmed.

The Prophet separated his army into four divisions as it moved into Makkah, which allowed them to enter the city from four directions. His commanders were under strict orders not to fight anyone unless they were attacked. The Muslim army moved in and Makkah surrendered. There was very little fighting against the division commanded by Khālid ibn al-Walīd. The Prophet, accompanied by many of his Companions, performed the circumambulation (*ṭawāf*), around the Kaʿbah, which is a form of Islamic worship. He had a stick in his hand. All around the Kaʿbah, the Quraysh had their idols which they worshipped. The Prophet pushed these with his stick. When he pushed an idol in the back, it fell on its face, and when it touched one in the front, it fell on its back. He then had all the idols and all the symbols of idolatry removed from the Kaʿbah, claiming the shrine for Islam forever.

Two days later, he addressed the people of Makkah. He asked them: "What do you think I will do with you?" They said: "All goodness. You are a noble

brother and your father was a noble brother" He responded: "You may all go as you please. You are all pardoned."[3] Before entering Makkah, the Prophet had named around twenty people who were to be killed wherever they were found. In the event, those of them who came to him personally, or escorted by a Muslim, to seek pardon were also pardoned. Only four of them were killed. Obviously, these were among the most hardened enemies of Islam.

The people of Makkah began to see Islam and the Muslims in a fresh light. Their pagan beliefs stood no comparison with Islam, and those with Muslim relatives discussed the changes that Islam brought about in their lives and soon felt that the only right course of action was to follow their lead. People came to the Prophet individually or in groups to declare their acceptance of Islam. Although not everyone in Makkah had a complete change of heart, as days went on, the change was taking hold of them and Makkah was fast becoming Muslim.

The fall of Makkah to Islam, however, did not mean that all danger from the pagan Arabs was over. A number of major tribes maintained the worship of idols and were ready to attack the Muslim state. When he was still in Makkah, the Prophet learned that the Hawāzin, a very large Arab tribe, was raising an army to fight him, with the support of the Thaqīf, another major tribe who lived in the city of Taif. As the Prophet had his army intact, he moved to meet the Hawāzin. His army swelled by another 2000 from Makkah, most of whom had converted to Islam only after Makkah had fallen to Islam. Some were still pagans, but they joined in, feeling that the Muslims would score an easy victory and would give them a share of the spoils of war.

The two sides met at the valley of Ḥunayn, but the Hawāzin were more familiar with the area and they arrived at the valley where they took their positions before the Muslims had arrived. The valley had a narrow entrance and the Muslim army had to pass through it. The Hawāzin stationed a large number of their best marksmen at a high level near the front and the back of the entrance, and as the front unit of the Muslim army moved through the entrance, which was in the still-dark hours before dawn, the marksmen started showering them with arrows, killing a good number of them. Soon confusion arose in the Muslim army and some of the units began to retreat, clashing with the advancing units. This was a terrible situation: however the Prophet remained steadfast, with only a small number of his Companions. One of these was his uncle, al-ʿAbbās, who had a loud voice. The Prophet told him to call on the Anṣār and on the Muhājirūn. As they heard the call,

[3] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 32.

they immediately responded, moving towards the voice. Soon, a small unit had gathered around the Prophet, with more men coming forward. They were able to withstand the Hawāzin onslaught and then to advance, forcing the Hawāzin on the retreat. Although the Muslim army had suffered an initial setback, the Prophet had managed to turn things around and cause confusion among the Hawāzin. The Hawāzin commander, Mālik ibn ʿAwf, committed a blunder in his preparations for the battle: despite advice to the contrary, he ordered his people to bring their women, children, and animals with them, as he assumed the people would fight much harder in order to defend their folk and property. When the Hawāzin's defeat became irreversible, their fighters fled, leaving their women, children, cattle and property, which became spoils of war to be taken by the Muslims.

The Prophet then laid siege to Taif, where the other major tribe of Thaqif lived. They were in collaboration with Hawāzin, so it was necessary to deal with them. However, the siege did not lead to any decisive outcome. Realizing that the people of Taif could stand a very long siege, as their supplies and water resources were to their rear, the Prophet thought it better to leave without forcing a showdown. He hoped that the people of Taif would have a better view once they had considered their options. Therefore, he ordered his army to depart.

People in the Muslim camp, particularly those who were newcomers to Islam, wanted the Prophet to divide the spoils of war that had been gained at Ḥunayn without delay. The Islamic rule assigns eighty percent of the spoils of war to be shared out by the army and twenty percent go to the state to look after orphans and people in need. The Prophet, however, wanted to delay such division, particularly in respect of the prisoners of war, who included the Hawāzin women and children. According to the universal rules of the day, these could become slaves, and the Prophet did not want that situation to occur. Eventually, the elders of Hawāzin came and appealed to him, pressing their old relation with him. The tribe of Saʿd ibn Bakr (to whom Ḥalīmah, his wet nurse, belonged) was a branch of Hawāzin. They said that had they suffered a defeat at the hands of the Persian or the Byzantine Emperors and they had such a relationship with them, they would have hoped for their kind treatment. The Prophet told them to choose either their women and children or their property. They chose their women and children. The Prophet ensured that all their womenfolk and children were freed and given back to them. The Muslims kept the cattle and the money, which were divided among the soldiers. Out of the one-fifth share of the state, the Prophet gave very generous gifts to some of the chiefs of Makkah and other tribes. He wanted to bring them wholeheartedly into the camp of Islam.

No such gifts were given to anyone of the Muhājirūn or the Anṣār, and the latter felt uneasy about this. Their chief, Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah, raised the matter with the Prophet. The Prophet appealed to their faith and sense of sacrifice. He then put the issue in the correct perspective: that which he had gifted was a "mere trifling of worldly luxury." They had their faith. The contrast could not be more marked: others went back home with sheep and cattle, while the Anṣār took God's Messenger. He finished his words by saying: "If the whole world went one way and the Anṣār went another way, I would go with the Ansar. May God have mercy on the Anṣār, their children and grandchildren."[4] That was enough to make them very happy. They said: "We are happy to have God's Messenger as our lot." All this was in line with their initial agreement with the Prophet, when they pledged their support to him eight years earlier at ʿAqabah in Mina, promising to protect and defend him as they would protect and defend their women and children. At the time, they asked him: "What do we get in return for honouring our pledges?" He replied: "Paradise." He had promised them no reward in this world.

Having appointed a twenty-year-old man, named ʿAttāb ibn Usayd, as governor of Makkah, the Prophet returned with his Companions to Madinah early in the ninth year after the Hijrah which is equivalent to 630 CE. Back in Madinah, delegations from various tribes began to arrive. Some came to pledge their loyalty, while others wanted to learn about Islam and go back to their people to consider their options. During the summer of that year, the Prophet told his Companions to get ready to march for a campaign against the Byzantine Empire. He had received information, provided by traders from Syria, that the Byzantines were preparing to invade Arabia. For the first time ever, the Prophet mentioned clearly and openly where the army would be heading to and named the enemy it would be fighting. Normally the Prophet left such matters ambiguous. The reason for his open indication was that for a long time the Arabs had held the Byzantines in awe. They never dared to stand in clear opposition to them. Besides, the time in mid-summer made such a long distance travel in a desert area very difficult. The Muslims were still poor, despite all the gains they had made, because their land did not have enough resources to make theirs an affluent society. Announcing a very difficult mission was certain to make any hypocrite try to find excuses, even very absurd ones, to avoid being involved. Thus, declaring the intended objective in advance made it a test for everyone. Only people with strong faith were expected to join. The Prophet also called on all Muslims to come forward with generous donations to the war effort. Many,

[4] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 146.

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[4] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 146.

particularly those among the earliest to accept Islam, donated generously. Several of them brought half of their properties. The largest donation was given by ʿUthmān: he provided 300 fully-equipped camels.

The army that went with the Prophet on this expedition was estimated to number 30,000, which was the largest army that had ever marched in the Arabian Peninsula. The Muslims of Madinah were reinforced by large numbers of the Muslims from Makkah and from all tribes that had accepted Islam. That in itself indicated that the Arabs were now a nation, rather than a host of independent and warring tribes. The going was certainly hard. By the time the army arrived in Tabūk (which is today in Saudi Arabia, not far from its borders with Jordan), they had endured much hardship. However, there was no trace of any Byzantine army in the area, or even further afield. Making sure that there was nothing to cause the Muslim state any worry, the Prophet sent detachments of his army to certain places in the area, calling on them to accept Islam. He made peace arrangements with several of them. This expedition achieved some important goals: it exposed the hypocrites that continued to plague the society of Madinah; it also ensured that the northern parts of Arabia felt that their best course was to live in peace with the Muslim state; and it strengthened the bonds within the Muslim community, as those who had plenty were ready to help their brethren who were poor.

When the Prophet and his Companions returned to Madinah, they felt their state was much more peaceful. Although it had started as a city-state, it now commanded a large area of Arabia. Delegations from tribes in remote areas continued to arrive in Madinah to declare their belief in Islam. The Prophet was very hospitable to these delegations, ensuring that they listened to the Qur'ān and learnt about Islam. He gave a generous gift to everyone in every delegation. One of these delegations came from the tribe of Thaqīf, who had a change of heart and mind. They wanted to live in peace with Islam, but they hoped that they would be given some concessions with regard to the Islamic way of life. Their six-man delegation assured the Prophet that they would become Muslims if he would agree to these concessions. They requested that they be allowed to retain their famous idol, al-Lāt. They also asked him to cancel the prohibition of adultery, alcoholic drinks and usury. The Prophet told them that they could expect no concession on any item. These were God's prohibitions, and no one could alter them. The only concession he gave them was that they would not be required to destroy al-Lāt with their own hands. He would send some of his Companions to do that. Thaqif eventually accepted his terms and embraced Islam. The Prophet sent several of his Companions, who destroyed al-Lat, as he previously destroyed all other idols.

When the pilgrimage season at the end of the ninth year after the Hijrah approached, the Prophet appointed his Companion, Abū Bakr, to lead the pilgrimage. Abū Bakr travelled to Makkah with a good number of Muslims. Shortly after his departure, God revealed *Sūrah* 9 of the Qur'ān, which opens with an announcement addressed to the remaining unbelievers in Arabia. Since the announcement gave notice to all Arabs, it had to be made, as the *sūrah* states in its opening, on the grand day of pilgrimage. Therefore, the Prophet sent his cousin, ʿAlī, to make the announcement: according to the Arabian tradition, it had to be made on his behalf by a member of his own family. The opening of the *sūrah* is as follows:

> Disavowal by God and His Messenger [is hereby announced] to those of the idolaters with whom you have made a treaty. [Announce to them:] You may go freely in the land for four months, but you must realize that you can never escape God's judgement, and that God shall bring disgrace upon the unbelievers. And a proclamation from God and His Messenger is hereby made to all mankind on this day of the greater pilgrimage: God is free from obligation to the idolaters, and so is His Messenger. If you repent, it shall be for your own good; and if you turn away, then know that you can never escape God's judgement. Give the unbelievers the news of grievous suffering, except for those idolaters with whom you have made a treaty and who have honoured their obligations [under the treaty] in every detail, and have not aided anyone against you. To these fulfil your obligations until their treaties have run their term. God loves those who are righteous. When these months of grace are over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captive, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place. Yet if they should repent, take to prayer and pay the *zakāt*, let them go their way. For God is Much-forgiving, Merciful. (9: 1-5)

This announcement meant that the Muslims were bound by the treaties they made with believers to the end of the terms specified by those treaties, provided that the other party had honoured their obligations under their treaty in full. Those who had not honoured their treaties in full were given notice of cancellation. Likewise, those who had treaties that did not specify a date of termination were also given notice of termination of the treaties. In both these last cases, the notice allowed them a period of grace of four months. They had to make their choice during those four months: either they would accept Islam

and live as Muslims or they must leave the Arabian Peninsula. In effect, the announcement claimed Arabia as a land of Islam where no pagans could live.

ʿAlī and Abū Bakr made the announcement on the day of attendance at ʿArafāt, where all pilgrims gather. They then made it again on the following day, which was the day of sacrifice. Again all pilgrims would be there. Furthermore, Abū Bakr sent callers to the camps of all tribes to make the announcement. Thus, all pilgrims were aware of it, which meant that all tribes heard of it as soon as their pilgrims returned home. Another announcement made clear that this was the last year that idolaters were allowed to offer the pilgrimage. No one was ever to be allowed to go around the Kaʿbah naked, as the Quraysh imposed on visitors from outside Makkah. This was a distortion of the worship rituals established by the Prophet Abraham when he built the Kaʿbah.

This announcement was made at the end of year 9 AH (631 CE). The following year is known in Islamic history as the Year of Delegations: delegations of Arabian tribes continued to come to Madinah where they pledged their loyalty to the Prophet as Muslims. They came from every corner of the Peninsula, including Yemen, Oman and the eastern and central parts. This ensured that the whole of the Arabian Peninsula accepted Islam as its faith. This was a remarkable achievement for the Prophet, as it had taken only twenty-two lunar years for Islam to be the only religion of all Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, there were other religions in Arabia. The Jews continued to live in Khaybar and other northern towns. There were Christians as well in Najrān in the south-west. The announcement did not apply to these: it applied only to the Arab idolaters. It was important that idolatry should disappear from Arabia.

As the tenth year after the Hijrah was coming to an end, the pilgrimage season was again approaching. The pilgrimage is one of the five main duties of Islamic worship: it is required of every Muslim, man or woman, at least once in a lifetime, provided that they have the means to offer it. So far, the Prophet could not offer the pilgrimage, because the Quraysh denied Muslims access to the Ḥaram area. The Prophet could have offered the pilgrimage a year earlier, but he did not wish to see idolaters performing their worship in the nude. Now that this was no longer the case, the Prophet announced his intention to offer the pilgrimage in the coming season. He sent messages making his intention clear to people all over Arabia. Therefore, pilgrims from all areas around Madinah and to the north came over to join him on his pilgrimage journey. As he proceeded, a large number of people went with him. Estimates of those pilgrims starting with the Prophet from Madinah vary between 90,000 and 130,000 people. A similar number awaited him in Makkah, where people from southern areas joined the population of Makkah.

The pilgrimage involves a series of rituals and duties of worship to be offered at particular places in Makkah and in the area close to it. The Prophet told people to follow his guidance in offering their duties. Throughout the journey the Prophet clearly had an important objective besides showing the people how their rituals should be offered: he wanted to make the pilgrimage easy for all. With such a large crowd moving from one place to another and attending to worship duties within a short span of time, a strict order and a rigid pattern would cause substantial inconvenience and hardship. Therefore, the Prophet provided maximum leeway in every respect, while making sure that the duties and rituals were offered correctly and within time.

The Prophet delivered a speech in which he outlined the main principles of Islam. He abrogated all usurious transactions that were made by anyone prior to their adoption of Islam, starting with those of his own uncle, al-ʿAbbās. He also waived all revenge for any killing that took place prior to Islam, starting with the killing of one of his own cousins. Thus, he provided a model for all Muslims to follow.

In his speech he outlined five basic principles of the Islamic programme of action. The first two principles operate on the level of the individual. The first indicate that Islam severs all ties that a Muslim has with *Jāhiliyyah* (its idols, practices, financial dealings, usury transactions and so on), because the adoption of the religion of Islam means a start of a new life for a Muslim which is completely divorced from the erroneous ways of the past. The second requires every Muslim to guard against all forms of sin. The Prophet also made it clear that, by sin, he did not mean the sinking back into idolatrous worship: he meant lesser sins that lead people away from the path of Islam. The other three principles provide the basis on which Islamic society is founded. One is the tie of Islamic brotherhood, which moulds the proper relationship between all Muslims. It is this brotherhood that makes every Muslim a patron and ally of every other Muslim. Next is the providing of support for the weak, so that their weakness does not make the whole society vulnerable. It is noteworthy that the Prophet repeatedly stressed the importance of being kind to women, since they were the weaker element in society. The last principle is the co-operation between Islamic government and the members of Islamic society to achieve the proper implementation of Islamic law, which works toward the removal of all evil from society and its replacement with what is good.

The Prophet repeatedly asked his audience whether he had delivered God's message to them. Every time they replied that he did. He asked God to be his witness. This was an emotional gesture that showed his heartfelt wish that his

tireless efforts had enabled him to fulfil his task as God's Messenger and deliver God's message to its intended addressees: namely, all mankind.

With the completion of the pilgrimage, the Prophet had indeed completed his mission, advocating God's message and calling on people to accept the faith of Islam based on self-surrender to God. He had shown them how to offer all their duties. He had shown them the way to conduct their lives in accordance with Islam, to earn God's pleasure and to be sure of receiving His reward, which is admittance into heaven in the life to come. During the pilgrimage, a Qur'ānic verse was revealed to him: "This day I have perfected your religion for you and have bestowed on you the full measure of My blessings and have chosen Islam as a religion for you." (5: 3)

The Prophet then returned to Madinah, and less than three months later, he passed away, having fulfilled his mission and given humanity a faith that ensures its happiness whenever it is implemented in any society.

May God grant him the full reward for the inestimable goodness that he brought into human life.

CHAPTER 3

THE KEY TO THE PROPHET'S CHARACTER

EVERY PERSON has a key to his or her character. When the key is identified, it is easy to deal with that person. This key allows us to explain their attitudes and behaviour, and to anticipate their reaction to events. This is just like a house key: it may be small, but it opens into a spacious place with all its contents. Without the key, the inside of the house remains unknown, and we can only hazard a blind guess as to what it contains. Similarly, the key to a person enables us to understand their behaviour, even when they act in a way that others find odd.

For the Prophet, we can only look for a key to his personality on the basis of his life before prophethood, that is, before he started to receive Divine revelations. At that time he acted on his own, knowing nothing about a Divine message that was to be assigned to him. Later, when he began to receive his message, he assumed a role that was unlike any other, and he was also receiving guidance from on high. His mission, responsibilities and actions benefited from this guidance and were based on it. Non-Muslims who wrote about his life in isolation of this fact came up with explanations that Muslims find problematic. Some of these accounts are unbiased, and some even admire him. Nevertheless, studying his life in ordinary human terms, giving no weight to the Divine guidance he received, will show some of his actions as questionable, and perhaps unjustifiable. His attitude in the negotiations with the Quraysh leading to the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement appeared odd, even to his closest Companions. He consulted no one, which was contrary to his previous patterns of behaviour, and he accepted all of the terms that were imposed by the enemy. In any human situation, what would historians, critics or analysts say about a negotiator who declared at the outset – as the Prophet did – that they would

accept any offer, and who actually sought no concession from the other side in return for agreeing to their terms?

When we set about looking for the key to Muhammad's personality in his life prior to the start of revelations, we soon discover that we will have some difficulty, as the reports we have of that period provide insufficient details and may be unreliable. Only those reports that the Prophet or his close Companions mentioned about his early years can be verified with regard to their authenticity. For example, one report states that as a suckling baby, Muhammad used to take his feed from only one of the breasts of his wet nurse. Muslim historians suggest, "it was as if he was made to do so by God to leave the other breast full for Ḥalīmah's own son." How can we verify this in the absence of later confirmation by the Prophet or by Ḥalīmah?

The reports that can be considered reliable point to a particular quality that we can consider to be the key to the Prophet's personality: the pursuit of right. When we examine Muhammad's personal history, we find this quality is consistent in his character, both before and after prophethood. This quality was even enhanced by the Divine message he delivered to mankind. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Muhammad was twenty years old when he took part in forging the noble 'al-Fuḍūl' alliance, which committed the Quraysh clans to stand united in support of anyone who was subjected to injustice in Makkah, whether this person belonged to Makkah or was a visitor. This was a bright moment in his pre-Islamic life, and one that he mentioned with fondness after prophethood. He was settled in Madinah when he said that he would not exchange his participation in that alliance for anything in the world; he stated that he would even honour it under Islam, should anyone appeal to him for help under its terms. The fact that this alliance was concluded in pre-Islamic days by idolatrous people did not detract from the fact that it was a noble alliance that aimed to give everyone their rights. This declaration by the Prophet confirms a sense of honour and integrity that can only be nurtured by a man who pursues what is right and stands up for it.

Throughout his life, Muhammad consciously maintained a very high standard of integrity. He would not knowingly tell a lie. In many societies, people do not look with abhorrence at telling lies. Of course, no one openly says that lying is something to be proud of, but people often advise a relative or a friend to lie in order to get out of a tricky situation. In the Arabian society of pre-Islamic days, lying was not a matter of great concern. Today, many societies expect a person to tell the truth in formal situations: for example, a witness who gives a false testimony in court is prosecuted. However, in small matters of daily

life people do not give a second thought about telling a lie when it serves their purpose. They even admit to the lie and do not expect to be censured; others often laugh or express approval. Muhammad, however, was widely known among his people for speaking the truth in all situations. The testimonies to this are numerous, coming from friend and foe alike.

In the fifth year of Muhammad's prophethood he advised a large number of his Companions to immigrate to Abyssinia. Fearing the consequences of such immigration, the Quraysh sent a delegation to Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, requesting their extradition. The delegation tried hard to get Negus to order such extradition without questioning the immigrants. Negus, however, was a fair man. Therefore, he called the immigrants to his court and asked them about their religion. Their spokesman, Ja'far, described their conditions before Islam. He then went on to say: "Then God sent us a Messenger whom we have always known to be a man of truth and honesty."[1]

Those who opposed the Prophet in Makkah had no hesitation in stating that he was a man of truth. When Muhammad received God's order to advocate Islam in public, he stood on the hill of al-Ṣafā in the centre of Makkah and called on all clans to come over to him. When they had gathered, he said to them:

> "If I were to tell you that armed horsemen are beyond this valley heading towards Makkah to attack you, would you believe me?"
>
> "You are trustworthy, and we have never known you to tell lies," they answered.
>
> "Well, then," he said, "I am sent to you to warn you against grievous suffering."[2]

Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Hasani Nadwi says that the Arabs' first answer in Makkah was evidence of their realistic and practical approach. They were responding to a man whom they had known to be honest and truthful and to always give sincere advice. He was standing on top of a hill where he could see what was beyond. In their position, they could not see anything beyond what was in their valley. They had no reason not to believe him, whatever he

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1 Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol, 1. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, (n.d.), p. 359.

2 Ibn Hishām, op. cit., pp. 280-281. Also, Amīn Duwaydār, *Ṣuwar Min Ḥayāt al-Rasūl*, op. cit., pp. 144-145; Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Arabic) vol. 2, al-Maktabah al-Raḥīmiyyah, India, pp. 702-703.

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Throughout his life, Muhammad consciously maintained a very high standard of integrity. He would not knowingly tell a lie. In many societies, people do not look with abhorrence at telling lies. Of course, no one openly says that lying is something to be proud of, but people often advise a relative or a friend to lie in order to get out of a tricky situation. In the Arabian society of pre-Islamic days, lying was not a matter of great concern. Today, many societies expect a person to tell the truth in formal situations: for example, a witness who gives a false testimony in court is prosecuted. However, in small matters of daily

life people do not give a second thought about telling a lie when it serves their purpose. They even admit to the lie and do not expect to be censured; others often laugh or express approval. Muhammad, however, was widely known among his people for speaking the truth in all situations. The testimonies to this are numerous, coming from friend and foe alike.

In the fifth year of Muhammad's prophethood he advised a large number of his Companions to immigrate to Abyssinia. Fearing the consequences of such immigration, the Quraysh sent a delegation to Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, requesting their extradition. The delegation tried hard to get Negus to order such extradition without questioning the immigrants. Negus, however, was a fair man. Therefore, he called the immigrants to his court and asked them about their religion. Their spokesman, Ja'far, described their conditions before Islam. He then went on to say: "Then God sent us a Messenger whom we have always known to be a man of truth and honesty."[1]

Those who opposed the Prophet in Makkah had no hesitation in stating that he was a man of truth. When Muhammad received God's order to advocate Islam in public, he stood on the hill of al-Ṣafā in the centre of Makkah and called on all clans to come over to him. When they had gathered, he said to them:

> "If I were to tell you that armed horsemen are beyond this valley heading towards Makkah to attack you, would you believe me?"
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> "You are trustworthy, and we have never known you to tell lies," they answered.
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> "Well, then," he said, "I am sent to you to warn you against grievous suffering."[2]

Shaykh Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Hasani Nadwi says that the Arabs' first answer in Makkah was evidence of their realistic and practical approach. They were responding to a man whom they had known to be honest and truthful and to always give sincere advice. He was standing on top of a hill where he could see what was beyond. In their position, they could not see anything beyond what was in their valley. They had no reason not to believe him, whatever he

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accept any offer, and who actually sought no concession from the other side in return for agreeing to their terms?

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said. This was a natural opening, which secured a testimony: in other words, it established Muhammad's credentials, which were well known to his audience.[3]

An example of testimony from his adversaries occurred at the time when the Prophet and his Companions went to Makkah for their compensatory *'Umrah* (mini-pilgrimage). As noted in Chapter 2, according to the peace agreement signed a year earlier between the Prophet and the unbelievers in Makkah, the Prophet and his Companions were to be allowed entry in Makkah and a stay of three days, but they were to have no armament other than swords in their sheaths. As the Muslims were about to start their journey from Madinah, the Prophet ordered that sufficient armament should be carried with them, so that they would be ready in case the Quraysh were bent on mounting a treacherous attack. When the Muslims were drawing near to Makkah, its people were informed by their advance party that the Muslims carried their armament with them. The Quraysh immediately sent Mikraz ibn Ḥafs with a few of its dignitaries to determine his intentions. Mikraz said to him:

> "Muhammad, you were never known to be treacherous, neither when you were young nor in your old age. Are you intending to get into the holy city where your own people live carrying arms, when you had promised that your party will carry only the ordinary arms of travellers: swords in sheaths?"
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> The Prophet answered: "I am not bringing arms into the city."
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> Mikraz said: "This is a man who is a model of honesty and sincerity."[4]

It was enough for the Quraysh delegation that Muhammad said he would not be bringing in the arms. They immediately returned to their people to reassure them that he would honour the agreement. Those people had been fighting him for nearly two decades, accusing him of every evil. Yet, they had no hesitation to accept his word as describing his true intention.

The pursuit of right requires the seeker to ensure that any trust afforded to them is well-placed. Muhammad was trusted throughout his life, and no one ever accused him of being unworthy of trust. On the contrary, long before Islam, the people of Makkah gave him the nickname *al-Amīn* (which means

[3] Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Hasani Nadwi, *Muhammad Rasulullah* (The Life of the Prophet Muhammad) Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow, India, p. 111.

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"trustworthy"). We see, for instance, that he was only in his early twenties when Khadījah, a wealthy widow, entrusted him to manage her own trade with a caravan travelling to Syria. She would not have given him such an important task unless she was certain that her trust would not be misplaced. She had an informed opinion of him, as she had tried him in the local bazaars. It was Muhammad's integrity and honesty in all situations that made Khadījah propose to him that they should get married. She had refused many earlier suitors, feeling that they were after her wealth. In Muhammad's case, she was the suitor because she recognized that he was a man of trust.

We have already mentioned that the Quraysh plotted to assassinate him in order to prevent his immigration. They moved with speed to carry out their plan. However, Muhammad had been given deposits for safekeeping. These deposits did not belong to Muslims in Makkah, as almost all Makkan Muslims had already immigrated to Madinah. Rather, the deposits belonged to unbelievers who were in the enemy camp. Despite the hostility of the people of Makkah to Muhammad and his message, they had no doubt whatsoever of his integrity and honesty. Anyone who had something precious would entrust it to Muhammad for safekeeping, certain that they would find it safe whenever they wanted it. As an aside, I find it amazing in this situation that they did not realise that a person of such honesty and integrity would not lie to God.

It stands to reason that this practice of keeping valuables with Muhammad did not begin after he became a Prophet and a Messenger of God, but would have started much earlier. People continued to recognize his honesty after he started to receive and advocate God's message: if anything, they felt that he was even more reliable and trustworthy. Muhammad gave 'Alī, his cousin, the task of returning people's deposits. By returning people's valuables after escaping an assassination attempt and after being chased out of the city, he confirmed that their trust in him was well placed. To him, it was inconceivable that he would change his practice, despite all the problems his people heaped on him. He always looked for what was right and did it; it was right that people who trusted him with their valuables should get their valuables back when he was leaving the city and could no longer keep them safe. The fact that they were hostile to him and his message altered nothing.

The pursuit of right requires fairness in any situation where people are at odds. The Prophet was always keen to establish justice, no matter who the quarrelling parties were. This was his aim before he was chosen for his great role as the Prophet, and it continued to be his aim whenever two parties put their dispute to him for judgement. For example, in Chapter 1 we noted the situation when he was asked to arbitrate in the case of the dispute between the

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Quraysh clans over the honourable act of putting the black stone back in place. There were several options open to him. He could have argued a case for his own clan (the Hāshim clan) to do that honourable job, as the Hāshimites were the most honourable clan. He could have ruled in favour of the clan, or clans, that had little to do with the Kaʿbah and the pilgrimage. Such a ruling would have given them something to enhance their position. He could have chosen a neutral person, or argued for his own neutrality. He did nothing of that. Rather, he recognized that the situation required a measure of total fairness and opted for a verdict in which all clans shared on equal footing. That was a verdict of complete justice: achieving what is right.

After prophethood, Muhammad was the judge in all disputes within the Muslim community, or between Muslims and non-Muslims. He declared to all concerned that he could only judge on the basis of the evidence presented to him:

> "Any of you," he warned, "may come up with apparently stronger evidence, and I would rule in his favour. Let him consider: if I give him something that by right belongs to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of hellfire. He may choose to take it or leave it."[5]

To a believer, this is a very strong warning, as it gives responsibility to the people concerned. They should know whether they have a rightful claim or not; or if they are in doubt, they should seek clarification. With this, the Prophet set a high standard of responsibility and made all people share in it, so that right and justice can be established.

In pre-Islamic days, Muhammad was very keen to be fair to all. When he was called upon to arbitrate, he ruled in fairness to all, because right requires fairness. When he became a Messenger of God, he elevated that to an even higher standard. An example pertains to the Jewish communities in Madinah. As stated in the previous chapter, the Jews were very unhappy about Islam and tried every method to undermine the Muslim community. They violated their treaty with the Prophet and sided with his enemies. However, when it came to judging cases involving the Jews, the Prophet set a clear example of ensuring justice. In one case, someone stole a shield of armour from another. Both belonged to the Anṣār, but apparently the thief was suspected of hypocrisy. When the evidence pointed to the real thief, he secretly hid the stolen shield in the home of a Jewish neighbour. He then asked his relatives to tell the

[5] Al-Bukhārī, chapter on "Testimonies", *ḥadīth* No. 2680.

Prophet that they had spotted the stolen shield in the Jew's home. They did, and the Prophet rebuked the accuser. However, the Prophet received Qur'ānic revelations telling him the facts. These were recorded in verses 105-113 of *Sūrah* 4 ("Women"). What would any ruler do in such a situation, where the accused enemy is innocent and the unsuspected friend is guilty? Let us look at the argument for keeping matters as they appeared with the material evidence pointing to the Jew as the thief, since the stolen shield was found in his home. Sayyid Qutb writes:

> Had human or worldly standards or considerations been the deciding factor in the Islamic code and its method of implementation, there would have been several reasons to overlook the whole event. A cover-up would have been concocted and the reality of the matter would not have been exposed in such a way as to approach a scandal. The first and clearest reason was that the accused himself was a Jew belonging to a Jewish community which was engaged in a tooth and nail fight against Islam, using every piece of armament at its disposal. The Muslims of that period were suffering much from the Jews' wicked designs. [God has willed that the Muslims should suffer much from the Jews at all times!] Those Jews in Madinah were not restrained by considerations of right or justice. They applied no moral standard in their dealings with the Muslim community.
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> Another reason stems from the fact that the issue directly concerned a group of the Anṣār, the Muslims of Madinah who provided the Prophet and his Makkan Companions with refuge, support and protection. Such an incident could have easily caused much disunity and hatred among their different groups. To direct accusations at a Jew would have averted any likelihood of division among them.
>
> A third reason for approving a cover-up was that it would have avoided giving the Jews in Madinah more armament with which to attack the Anṣār. Exposure would allow the Jews to denounce the Anṣār as stealing from one another and then falsely and knowingly accusing the Jews of committing their own crimes. The Jews were certain not to allow such an opportunity to pass them by.[6]

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Without hesitation, the Prophet declared the Jew innocent. He was unconcerned with any of the considerations that would have swayed people in favour of a cover up. He was concerned with the establishment of rightness and fairness. He impressed on all his Companions that unfairness would lead to ruin, of both individual and community, because justice establishes right and strengthens the community. We see clearly how the pursuit of right led Muhammad to be fair in his verdict long before the advent Islam, and we can see how, under Islam, the pursuit of rightness made him set justice at a superior standard.

The pursuit of rightness appears to be something implanted in the nature of Muhammad from a very early age. This is clear in the report of his encounter with a Christian monk in Syria when he was still a child of twelve. The report is widely circulated in the sources of Islamic history, but its reliability cannot be absolutely ascertained. Several Orientalists consider it to be an important piece of evidence, and one that supports their claims that Muhammad met Christian clerics and learned from them. We do not need to discuss these claims here: except to say that if this is their evidence, then their case remains weak.

The report in question mentions that at the age of twelve Muhammad clung to his uncle Abū Ṭālib as the latter was about to set on a business trip to Syria with a trade caravan. A soft hearted uncle, Abū Ṭālib took his beloved nephew with him. The caravan route passed close to the hermitage of Baḥīrā, a Christian monk, who invited the people of the caravan to have a meal with him. As he served them, he kept looking at Muhammad. He then took him aside and questioned him about himself. He then asked him under an oath by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, two of the main Arab idols. Muhammad interrupted him, saying: "Do not ask me by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, for I hate nothing as I hate them." Baḥīrā rephrased his question, putting it with an oath by God, and Muhammad answered him normally. After this conversation, Baḥīrā asked Abū Ṭālib what relation Muhammad was to him. When he confirmed that Muhammad's father died before his birth, Baḥīrā told Abū Ṭālib to take extra care of his nephew as the Jews, in particular, could harm him.

The point here is the hatred expressed by a twelve-year-old to the idols worshipped by his people: this is not an attitude based on any religious principle. At that time Muhammad had no exposure to any religious teachings, other than what was known in Makkah, which was a very low form of idolatry. There were some people in Makkah who rejected idolatry, but none of them showed any inclination to start advocating a new religion. Even those whose rejection of idolatry was well known and reported were either still looking for a better faith, such as Waraqah ibn Nawfal, or were very young, such as Zayd ibn ʿAmr. This

was an instinctive dislike based, perhaps, on personal observation that those deities were no more than man-made statutes.

The rejection of idolatry remained with Muhammad throughout his life. He was an adult when the incident of the idol Buwābah (reported in Chapter 1) occurred. As someone who was loved by all his family, he yielded to his aunts' pressure and went to the festival of that idol, because it meant much to his family. Whenever he came near any idol, he was told to stay away from it. That is an aspect of the Divine protection from anything to do with pagan worship. More relevant here is his refusal to attend this festival year after year despite pressure from his aunts to take part in it. This tells us that he was totally unconvinced by the worship of such idols, as it did not meet his criteria for what was right. To him those idols were useless objects, made by people, placed in position by people and venerated by people: this was absurd to Muhammad, who always looked for what was right.

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Without hesitation, the Prophet declared the Jew innocent. He was unconcerned with any of the considerations that would have swayed people in favour of a cover up. He was concerned with the establishment of rightness and fairness. He impressed on all his Companions that unfairness would lead to ruin, of both individual and community, because justice establishes right and strengthens the community. We see clearly how the pursuit of right led Muhammad to be fair in his verdict long before the advent Islam, and we can see how, under Islam, the pursuit of rightness made him set justice at a superior standard.

The pursuit of rightness appears to be something implanted in the nature of Muhammad from a very early age. This is clear in the report of his encounter with a Christian monk in Syria when he was still a child of twelve. The report is widely circulated in the sources of Islamic history, but its reliability cannot be absolutely ascertained. Several Orientalists consider it to be an important piece of evidence, and one that supports their claims that Muhammad met Christian clerics and learned from them. We do not need to discuss these claims here: except to say that if this is their evidence, then their case remains weak.

The report in question mentions that at the age of twelve Muhammad clung to his uncle Abū Ṭālib as the latter was about to set on a business trip to Syria with a trade caravan. A soft hearted uncle, Abū Ṭālib took his beloved nephew with him. The caravan route passed close to the hermitage of Baḥīrā, a Christian monk, who invited the people of the caravan to have a meal with him. As he served them, he kept looking at Muhammad. He then took him aside and questioned him about himself. He then asked him under an oath by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, two of the main Arab idols. Muhammad interrupted him, saying: "Do not ask me by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, for I hate nothing as I hate them." Baḥīrā rephrased his question, putting it with an oath by God, and Muhammad answered him normally. After this conversation, Baḥīrā asked Abū Ṭālib what relation Muhammad was to him. When he confirmed that Muhammad's father died before his birth, Baḥīrā told Abū Ṭālib to take extra care of his nephew as the Jews, in particular, could harm him.

The point here is the hatred expressed by a twelve-year-old to the idols worshipped by his people: this is not an attitude based on any religious principle. At that time Muhammad had no exposure to any religious teachings, other than what was known in Makkah, which was a very low form of idolatry. There were some people in Makkah who rejected idolatry, but none of them showed any inclination to start advocating a new religion. Even those whose rejection of idolatry was well known and reported were either still looking for a better faith, such as Waraqah ibn Nawfal, or were very young, such as Zayd ibn ʿAmr. This

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breeze. There Muhammad would stay for several days, in total devotion. The Arabic term for such devotion is *taḥannuth*, which means "self purification." The Prophet did not tell us what sort of worship he used to offer in those days. The Qur'ān, however, tells us that he never expected to receive revelations from on high prior to the moment when the angel came to him with the first revelation.[7] It also states that he never read any book nor could he write with his hand.[8] During this period, Muhammad had no clear concept of God. As one of those individuals who sought to follow a religion that provided a clear vision, Zayd ibn ʿAmr used to address God and say: "My Lord, I do not know a proper method of how to worship you." Probably Muhammad would have said the same during that time.

Some Muslim historians say that before prophethood, Muhammad worshipped according to the religion of Abraham. In pre-Islamic days, the Arabs used to take pride in the fact that they were the descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael. However, the religion their ancestors followed, as taught to them by the Prophet Ishmael, had become so blurred that only some rudimentary aspects of it remained, mostly in connection with the pilgrimage. Even the pilgrimage rituals had been vastly distorted. They continued to believe in God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, but to them God was distant. Hence, they believed that they needed to worship deities and idols, which would bring them closer to God.[9] Therefore, what we understand by the statement that Muhammad in those days of solitude worshipped according to Abraham's religion is that he addressed his devotion to God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He, however, had no clear notion of God or how to worship Him. His devotion was merely an attempt to have a better notion through solitude and contemplation. Hence, we take his periods of solitude, which became more frequent in his late thirties, as consistent with his pursuit of right. What he was after was a correct understanding of man's position and life.

During one of those periods of solitude the angel came to him for the first time (as related in Chapter 1). This was his first communication with the realm beyond. No human being is ever prepared for such contacts; hence, Muhammad trembled and felt fear. He did not know the nature of the contact, nor the nature of the angel he received. He could not tell anything about it. This explains his speedy flight home, and his appeal to his wife to cover him and wrap him with something warm. Reassurances by his wife did not give him

[7] The Qur'ān: 28: 86.
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any certainty, however; how could he be certain when she had no knowledge of the matter either? Yet her reassurances were based on the fact that he was of noble character. She said to him: "You are kind to your kinsfolk; you help the weak; you are generous to the poor; you welcome guests."[10] She also said that he always told the truth. She added that a person of such qualities could never be let down by God.

Muhammad was not satisfied with his wife's reassurance, as it was merely a logical argument, and he wanted more. Hence, he went with his wife to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a cousin of hers. Waraqah was an old blind man who had travelled far and wide in pursuit of the right faith. He converted to Christianity and was well versed with the Bible. Waraqah listened to every detail of the encounter with the angel before he made his conclusion: "You have met the archangel who used to come to the Prophet Moses." Waraqah also told him that he would be the Messenger that had been promised in all Divine scriptures. He further stated that Muhammad's task would be difficult, and that his people would drive him out: "I wish I will be alive then, for I will be certain to give you unwavering support."[11] It appears from the reports we have that Waraqah met him more than once over the next few days, giving him reassurance. However, Waraqah was soon to die.

Here we see a man who has had a unique experience, the like of which was unknown to anyone among his people. There was no record of anyone who was a Prophet among the Arabs since Ishmael. Hence, the truth of the matter should be arrived at, and that was the purpose of those meetings with Waraqah. From him, as a human scholar who was keenly interested in religion, Muhammad had received some insight into prophethood. Therefore, he could better understand the reassurances given by the angel on the subsequent visits, and the truth was soon arrived at.

Hence, the next revelation reassured Muhammad about the future, but advised him that he needed to get ready for the task assigned to him, which was to be a difficult one. He could only prepare himself for it through long hours of devotion and prayer during the night:

> You enfolded one! Stand in prayer at night, all but a small part of it, half of it, or a little less, or add to it. Recite the Qur'ān calmly and distinctly. We shall bestow on you a weighty message. The night hours are strongest of tread and most upright of speech. During the day you have a long

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chain of things to attend to. Therefore, remember your Lord's name and devote yourself wholeheartedly to Him. He is the Lord of the east and the west. There is no deity other than Him. Take Him for your guardian (73: 1-9)

The Prophet complied: he stood in worship for long hours every night for a whole year. He knew that it was his duty, and this gave him further reassurance. He realized that he had been assigned a difficult task that would put humanity on the right course in the most important questions of religion and worship. This was the absolute truth coming to him from the right source, God Almighty. He no longer needed to pursue right, as he would know it in every situation for the remainder of his life.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEED FOR A DIVINE MESSAGE

THE ANGEL CAME when Muhammad was in seclusion in the cave of Mount Ḥirā', and told him to read the first five short verses of the Qur'ān. Muhammad's prophethood started at the moment he received these first revelations.

Like other scholars, Imam Ibn Hazm defines prophethood as the acquisition of knowledge that is absolutely certain and cannot be gained through human endeavour or experience. Such knowledge can only be bestowed by God, and He gives it only to those of His servants whom He chooses to be Prophets. Some Prophets may be given Divine messages, which they then deliver to the people to whom they are addressed. If a Prophet is not given a message of his own, he works with the message of an earlier Messenger. The Children of Israel had countless Prophets: but the Messengers among them were few. Moses and Aaron are perhaps the clearest examples of this. God chose Moses to relay the message contained in the Torah, whereas Aaron was a Prophet working with Moses' message. A number of God's Messengers are mentioned in the Qur'ān by name, but God states that He also sent Messengers of whom He chose not to tell us. Addressing the Prophet, He says in the Qur'ān: "We sent other Messengers before your time; some We have given you an account of, while others We have not." (40: 78)

Shortly after the beginning of his revelations, Muhammad became God's Messenger, as God revealed to him the verses: "You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning" (74: 1-2).[1] This meant that the Prophet would advocate the Divine faith in accordance with the message that he would be receiving. Whatever remained intact from previous Divine messages (that is, free from

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distortion) would be endorsed or amended by the new message. In all previous cases, God's Messengers were sent to their own peoples, speaking their languages and calling on them to believe in God and to conduct their lives in accordance with the messages delivered to them. The Prophet was declared God's final Messenger and his message was the last to be given by God to mankind. For this reason, his message is contained in a book – the Qur'ān – which God has guaranteed to preserve intact for the rest of time.

That humanity is always in need of a Divine message is beyond doubt, and this is closely related to the purpose of man's creation. According to all Prophets and to God's Messengers, man undertakes the task of building virtuous life on earth. As the Prophet Ṣāliḥ urged his people to worship God alone, he said to them: "He it is who brought you into being out of the earth and settled you therein." (11: 61) With settlement comes progress and the enhancement of the beautiful and beneficial (as its Arabic equivalent *ista'marakum*, which is used in this Qur'ānic verse, connotes). When we consider our position in the universe, it becomes clear that despite all the discoveries and advancements that we have made over the centuries, we can only move within a limited area and our abilities are finite. Man has always felt that there is a vast world beyond, and it is the endeavour to reach to this and discover its secrets that has motivated his research, scientific pursuit, philosophical theories, poetry and fiction. This has given rise to every advancement made by man. Yet, even those who make the most exciting discoveries are the first to acknowledge that they are only scratching the surface and that there is much more beyond.

This applies to human nature, psychology, feelings and emotions as much as it applies to the material world around us. When we deal with the material world, we may make mistakes. However, we can always revise our methods and correct our errors. The situation is not so straightforward when we regulate for feelings, emotions and human nature. A small mistake in these areas could have far-reaching adverse consequences. The need to avert such consequences by correcting an initial mistake is often resisted by a section of the population, because every human situation has its positive and negative aspects. Those who stand to benefit by its positives will – understandably – resist the change. Moreover, when we try to correct such consequences, we often go too far in the opposite direction, so that after some time another correction is needed. Had there been proper guidance in the first place, many errors of society could be averted.

For example, looking at sexual morality in Western society, and its development over the last two centuries, we find that the nineteenth century applied strict values. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed two world wars,

which took away almost all of this strictness. Once the contraceptive pill was deemed safe, the so-called "sexual revolution" of the 1960s was hailed as liberation from arbitrary values. Intellectual discussion contrasting nineteenth and twentieth century values in this area tended to dismiss the earlier strict approaches as hypocritical: it was assumed that the earlier population did not really believe in strict values, but were compelled by society to keep up pretences. Any argument that the literature of the time did not support such a judgement is usually countered by the view that novelists and playwrights had to exercise self-censorship so that their works would not be banned. On the other hand, Western society has moved so far away from the values of those days that some people may wonder whether what remains unacceptable today may be acceptable in future.

In recent years, scientific advancement has posed some very difficult ethical questions, particularly with regard to genetic engineering and medically-assisted conception and pregnancy. Human society has been trying hard to find satisfactory answers to questions such as the following: Who has the rightful claim to the child born by a surrogate mother? If a woman agrees with a couple to bear a baby that is the result of artificial insemination, but later decides to keep the child when it is born, is it enough that she refunds the couple whatever fee they might have paid her in advance? How binding is such a contract? Is it right to use test tube techniques to help an elderly woman to conceive (as in the recent case where a sixty-nine year old woman gave birth through artificial insemination)? To what extent can genetic engineering be used in order to give couples a choice of their prospective child's sex and characteristics? How about medically assisted suicide: is it right to help terminally ill people to end their lives, if they so desire?

In such matters, it is difficult to determine the extent to which human society can proceed on the basis of trial and error. If the adverse consequences of trials in a particular area are grave and difficult to cure, this may mean that people are subjected to serious problems that they might have been spared if proper guidance was available. We need guidance to avoid areas of danger and to lead a reasonably happy life. Given that human experience cannot provide this guidance, the only source available to us is the Creator: He knows His creation and can determine what will benefit or harm us.

Divine guidance has been given to us ever since humanity came into existence. It is provided in two ways: the first is human nature, when it is sound and uncorrupted by negative influences, and the second is through Prophets. These two work together, as the message preached by Prophets enhances the resources of human nature and ensures that it remains on the right track. We need to

distortion) would be endorsed or amended by the new message. In all previous cases, God's Messengers were sent to their own peoples, speaking their languages and calling on them to believe in God and to conduct their lives in accordance with the messages delivered to them. The Prophet was declared God's final Messenger and his message was the last to be given by God to mankind. For this reason, his message is contained in a book – the Qur'ān – which God has guaranteed to preserve intact for the rest of time.

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remind ourselves here of the definition of prophethood, which is the acquisition of knowledge that is absolutely certain and cannot be gained through human endeavour or experience.

God, according to Islam, is the Creator of the universe and all that exists. He is Absolute, Caring and Compassionate. His knowledge is perfect and encompasses all. In order to appreciate God's knowledge we may say that it is perfect and independent of time and place. In other words, nothing is added to it as a result of any event in the universe. We cannot say that there has been a point when God did not know something and then learned it: that does not apply to God. As such, God is the only source that can provide us guidance that is perfect and applicable to human life. He has done so through the messages that His Messengers have delivered.

Life after Death

A question that has constantly puzzled humanity is what happens to us after we die. The standpoint of Divine religion is that we will be resurrected for a second, everlasting life when we have to account for what we do in this life and will be richly rewarded if our good deeds outweigh our evil ones. Those people whose bad deeds far exceed their good deeds will be judged by God: He will choose to either forgive or punish them. This Divine judgement will send people to heaven or hell, as God – in His absolute justice and compassion – determines to be fair. He is never unjust to anyone, and His forgiveness may be total. He forgives all sins, including very serious ones, with the one exception of alleging that He has partners of any sort. Therefore, all those who believe in God's Oneness, accept His message and do good deeds in this present life will be certain to receive God's forgiveness of their sins and be rewarded for their good deeds.

As this present life of ours is limited and short in duration, while the second life is everlasting, it stands to reason that everyone should prepare for the latter by believing in God and doing good works in this life. When people accept this calling and abide by it, its benefit has a strong influence on man's life on earth. People who do good are loved and respected by those around them, as they benefit their community. This means that the course promoted by Divine faith will have strong and positive effects on this present life of ours and will at the same time ensure happiness in the life to come.

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and will not allow injustice to triumph. There is much injustice in human life, both at the individual and community levels. Instances of injustice are found everywhere: the master who ill-treats his servants; the employer who pays small wages for highly profitable work; the multinationals who amass huge profits while keeping their third-world workforce under the poverty line; the husband who batters his wife; the parents who abuse their children; and the dictator who tyrannizes over the entire population of a country. The number of injustices in any village, town, city or country is beyond measure. Yet God is just and does not allow injustice to go unpunished.

Unjust situations are prevalent in the world around us, and when an unjust situation develops, attempts are usually made to rectify it. Had this life of ours been an end in itself, these attempts would be successful, and all wrongs would be rectified within it. Man is the most precious of all creatures in our world. Therefore, situations that bring misery in human society should be prevented in the first place and rectified when they occur. However, many remain unresolved, at both the individual and community levels. It is logical, then, to conclude that neither God's system of creation nor His justice would allow such imperfection in a perfectly designed life system. Therefore, a second life where justice would be established in full is necessary. This is what has been promised by Divine faith ever since the creation of man. This is presented in the clearest terms in the Qur'ān, which embodies the Islamic message.

Furthermore, when we look at life in our world, we find that there are countless balances that must work together in order for life to continue. If any of these balances should be disturbed, even in a small measure, disastrous effects for both man and environment could follow. Such measured balances could not have occurred by themselves, rather they are the product of God's fine design and perfect tuning of the world we live in. This fine-tuning and balancing also applies to the entire universe. The Creator is unlikely to have established such a perfect design only to abandon it and leave the world to regulate itself without any intervention. This would be like a mechanical engineer who designed a perfect machine then left it to run by itself without considering its maintenance. Rather, God's guidance provides the insights that man needs to maintain this balance. Such insight cannot be obtained from any other source.

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environment. Responsibility goes hand in hand with accountability. We are accountable to God, and such accountability is held in the life to come. Moreover, it is right that our record is held open before God, because it is He who has given us the means and tools to fulfil the responsibility He has assigned to us. We must not forget that this responsibility serves our own interests, as this requires us to build a happy human life on earth and promote human progress.

The Final Message

God has bestowed guidance upon us in the form of a message, which He delivered to us through a human Messenger who led a normal life in the midst of an ordinary human society. This message was sent to help us discharge our responsibility and to present a good account of our time on earth. Over the centuries, God sent many Messengers with His guidance. They all delivered the same basic message, although there were differences in matters of detail. All religions required people to believe in God's Oneness, offer their prayers and pay *zakāt* (i.e. obligatory charity). These are the pillars of Divine faith in all its forms. They constitute the purity of belief, and are based on the acknowledgement of man's position as servant of God who addresses prayers to Him alone, and maintains social collaboration and security. However, God's Messengers were initially sent to their own peoples and were also given messages that applied to their communities only. As humanity reached its maturity, it was necessary to place before it a message from God that would equally apply to all mankind in all future generations and everywhere in the world. This message is embodied in the Qur'ān, God's own word, as delivered to us through the Prophet who received it from the angel Gabriel.

Whenever a Prophet addressed his people, calling on them to believe in God and in the Day of Judgement, they asked him to come up with miraculous evidence in support of his message. The Arabs of Makkah also demanded such miracles from the Prophet. God gave earlier Messengers such miraculous signs: the Prophet Moses transformed his staff into a fast moving serpent, and his hand changed colour when he put it on his chest; the Prophet Jesus cured the blind man and restored a dead man to life; and other Prophets were given miracles that suited their peoples and their standard of civilization. The Prophet Muhammad was given none of these because his message was applicable to all mankind in all generations. To produce a miracle seen by a limited group of people, large as it may be, at a particular time and in a particular place, does not fit with that status of his message and its universal applicability. The Prophet refers to this when he says:

> Every Prophet was given such miraculous signs as would make people believe. What I have been given is revelations bestowed on me by God. I hope that I will be the one with the largest following on the Day of Judgement.[2]

The messages given to earlier Messengers took different forms. Scriptures were given to Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and the psalms were given to David. The Qur'ān describes both the Torah and the Gospel as containing "guidance and light."[3] However, these messages suffered changes and distortion that in some cases went in the opposite direction of what God wanted. People often ask why God allowed such distortion to creep into His messages. The reason is that God did not intend these messages to be the final ones. He has promised to preserve His final message intact and free of any distortion. As this final message addresses all mankind, in all generations, then it must be in the form of a book: it could not take any other form. Hence, we have the Qur'ān, God's word that has remained, and will forever remain, available to all mankind in its original form, free from any distortion according to God's guarantee. Scholars have shown how the Qur'ān was preserved from the first days of revelation. Today, the Qur'ān is read every day, throughout the world, as it has been ever since the completion of its revelation over 1400 years ago. There is absolutely no difference between copies written in long hand many centuries ago and copies produced today anywhere in the world.

Some people wonder how a message that was revealed fourteen centuries ago could be applicable today, or in another thousand years. There are certain areas that apply to all people anywhere in the world, regardless of their standard of development, such as the relation between man and God. In this area rules are set in a flexible way, so that people can adjust their time and commitment to meet the demands of religion without difficulty. Prayer is a clear example. We offer five obligatory prayers every day. However, the time range allowed for each makes it easy for anyone to offer these prayers without missing any. Moreover, in cases of emergency, there are concessions to enable people to fulfil their duty. In other areas, where social conditions undergo fundamental change, the Divine message lays down clear principles and values that must be applied, leaving people to conduct their life as they please. For example, economic conditions in a developed industrial society are greatly different from a mediaeval agricultural society. In this area, Islamic principles prohibit usury,

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[2] Al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīth* No. 7274; Muslim, *ḥadīth* No. 152.

[3] The Qur'ān: 5: 44, 46.

environment. Responsibility goes hand in hand with accountability. We are accountable to God, and such accountability is held in the life to come. Moreover, it is right that our record is held open before God, because it is He who has given us the means and tools to fulfil the responsibility He has assigned to us. We must not forget that this responsibility serves our own interests, as this requires us to build a happy human life on earth and promote human progress.

The Final Message

God has bestowed guidance upon us in the form of a message, which He delivered to us through a human Messenger who led a normal life in the midst of an ordinary human society. This message was sent to help us discharge our responsibility and to present a good account of our time on earth. Over the centuries, God sent many Messengers with His guidance. They all delivered the same basic message, although there were differences in matters of detail. All religions required people to believe in God's Oneness, offer their prayers and pay *zakāt* (i.e. obligatory charity). These are the pillars of Divine faith in all its forms. They constitute the purity of belief, and are based on the acknowledgement of man's position as servant of God who addresses prayers to Him alone, and maintains social collaboration and security. However, God's Messengers were initially sent to their own peoples and were also given messages that applied to their communities only. As humanity reached its maturity, it was necessary to place before it a message from God that would equally apply to all mankind in all future generations and everywhere in the world. This message is embodied in the Qur'ān, God's own word, as delivered to us through the Prophet who received it from the angel Gabriel.

Whenever a Prophet addressed his people, calling on them to believe in God and in the Day of Judgement, they asked him to come up with miraculous evidence in support of his message. The Arabs of Makkah also demanded such miracles from the Prophet. God gave earlier Messengers such miraculous signs: the Prophet Moses transformed his staff into a fast moving serpent, and his hand changed colour when he put it on his chest; the Prophet Jesus cured the blind man and restored a dead man to life; and other Prophets were given miracles that suited their peoples and their standard of civilization. The Prophet Muhammad was given none of these because his message was applicable to all mankind in all generations. To produce a miracle seen by a limited group of people, large as it may be, at a particular time and in a particular place, does not fit with that status of his message and its universal applicability. The Prophet refers to this when he says:

> Every Prophet was given such miraculous signs as would make people believe. What I have been given is revelations bestowed on me by God. I hope that I will be the one with the largest following on the Day of Judgement.[2]

The messages given to earlier Messengers took different forms. Scriptures were given to Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and the psalms were given to David. The Qur'ān describes both the Torah and the Gospel as containing "guidance and light."[3] However, these messages suffered changes and distortion that in some cases went in the opposite direction of what God wanted. People often ask why God allowed such distortion to creep into His messages. The reason is that God did not intend these messages to be the final ones. He has promised to preserve His final message intact and free of any distortion. As this final message addresses all mankind, in all generations, then it must be in the form of a book: it could not take any other form. Hence, we have the Qur'ān, God's word that has remained, and will forever remain, available to all mankind in its original form, free from any distortion according to God's guarantee. Scholars have shown how the Qur'ān was preserved from the first days of revelation. Today, the Qur'ān is read every day, throughout the world, as it has been ever since the completion of its revelation over 1400 years ago. There is absolutely no difference between copies written in long hand many centuries ago and copies produced today anywhere in the world.

Some people wonder how a message that was revealed fourteen centuries ago could be applicable today, or in another thousand years. There are certain areas that apply to all people anywhere in the world, regardless of their standard of development, such as the relation between man and God. In this area rules are set in a flexible way, so that people can adjust their time and commitment to meet the demands of religion without difficulty. Prayer is a clear example. We offer five obligatory prayers every day. However, the time range allowed for each makes it easy for anyone to offer these prayers without missing any. Moreover, in cases of emergency, there are concessions to enable people to fulfil their duty. In other areas, where social conditions undergo fundamental change, the Divine message lays down clear principles and values that must be applied, leaving people to conduct their life as they please. For example, economic conditions in a developed industrial society are greatly different from a mediaeval agricultural society. In this area, Islamic principles prohibit usury,

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[2] Al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīth* No. 7274; Muslim, *ḥadīth* No. 152.

[3] The Qur'ān: 5: 44, 46.

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A Human Messenger

God did not choose to reveal His book of guidance at one go, so that people could study it carefully and then implement it. Rather, He gave us a much better option, sending us a Messenger to deliver His message and teach us how to put it into practice. The Messenger was a human being who had been born and raised in the same way as everyone else. He was not distinguished, except by the fact that he was the recipient of God's message and by his personal traits. He moved about and conducted his life like an ordinary human being.

That God should choose an ordinary person to deliver His message is a point of contention for unbelievers. They often wonder why God chose an ordinary human being as His Messenger instead of an angel. This is based on the idea that if an angel delivers the message, people would know its importance and would accept it. Such argument is based on the way people do their own affairs. When heads of states send messages to their counterparts, they will send the prime minister or a foreign minister: giving the message greater importance through the identity or the position of its bearer. Divine messages acquire their importance from the fact that they come from God. A Divine message is sent so that it should be implemented by people in their own life. If an angel is sent with it and shows people how to implement it, people are certain to argue that it cannot be applicable to them as they are not angels. When the people commit a sin, they will say that they are unable to avoid it because they are human; whereas God's Messenger would find the avoidance of sin easy, because angels are made to do what God bids them. To be relevant, a message from God must be delivered only by a member of the community to which it is sent. So, a message to mankind can be delivered only by a human being. God states in the Qur'ān:

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those words, Khuwaylah went to the Prophet to put her complaint against her husband. It is useful to learn her story as she told it:

> I was married to Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit and he had grown old, with a quick temper. He came in one day and I questioned something he had said. He was angry as a result and said to me, "You are to me like my mother's back." He then went out and sat with his people for some time. He came back later and he indicated that he wanted to have sex. I said: "In no way! By Him who holds Khuwaylah's soul in His hand, you cannot approach me when you have said what you said until God and His Messenger have ruled in our case." He tried to force me, but I overpowered him in the way a woman can overpower a weak old man. I left him and went to one of my neighbours to borrow a dress from her.
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> I went to the Prophet and sat in front of him. I told him what had happened and complained strongly about my husband's bad manners. The Prophet said to me: "Khuwaylah! Your cousin is an old man; so be kind and God-fearing in your treatment of him." Before I left, revelations were bestowed from on high concerning me. The Prophet experienced what he usually experienced when revelations were given to him. Then he came to and said: "Khuwylah! God has revealed Qur'ānic verses concerning you and your mate." He then read to me the verses starting with "God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all. Even if any of you says to your wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not your mothers; their mothers are those who gave them birth. What they say is iniquitous and false. Yet God pardons and forgives. Those who separate themselves from their wives by saying, 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother,' and then go back on what they have said, must atone by freeing a slave before the couple may resume their full marital relation. This is an admonition to you, and God is fully aware of all that you do. However, he who does not have the means shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may resume their full marital relation; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy people; this, so that you may prove your faith in God and His Messenger. Such are the bounds set by God. Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe." (58: 1-4)
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> The Prophet then said to me: "Tell him to free a slave." I said: "Messenger of God! He does not have the means to do so." He said: "Then let him fast two consecutive months." I said: "He is certainly an old man who cannot fast." He said: "He should then feed sixty poor people with a *wasq*[4] of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! By God, he cannot afford that." The Prophet then said: "We will help him, then, with a sack of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! I, too, will help him with another sack." The Prophet said: "That is good and kind of you. Go and give this to charity on his behalf, and take good care of your cousin." I did as the Prophet told me. (Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.)[5]

This case illustrates the degree of involvement by God's Messenger in the life of the Muslim community throughout those twenty-three years of revelation. This involves a case of a simple woman and her old and weak husband who had an argument that led to an untenable situation. The solution came directly from God, who said that He had listened to her complaint. Those years of assistance provided by God's Messenger to the first Muslim community were necessary, as they provided practical guidance that has been studied by scholars over the years so that proper implementation of Divine guidance in different times and environments is made easy and straightforward. They also gave God's Messenger the necessary time to mould a coherent society, united by its faith and advocacy of the Divine message, out of an unruly tribal society where unwarranted raids were common practice. The Muslim society that the Prophet moulded over this period was well equipped to carry God's message to mankind and to initiate the Islamic civilization that was to lead humanity for many centuries.

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[4] A *wasq* is a measure of volume estimated to weigh about 130 kilograms of wheat.

[5] Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, vol. 16, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2009, pp. 393-394.

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> I went to the Prophet and sat in front of him. I told him what had happened and complained strongly about my husband's bad manners. The Prophet said to me: "Khuwaylah! Your cousin is an old man; so be kind and God-fearing in your treatment of him." Before I left, revelations were bestowed from on high concerning me. The Prophet experienced what he usually experienced when revelations were given to him. Then he came to and said: "Khuwylah! God has revealed Qur'ānic verses concerning you and your mate." He then read to me the verses starting with "God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all. Even if any of you says to your wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not your mothers; their mothers are those who gave them birth. What they say is iniquitous and false. Yet God pardons and forgives. Those who separate themselves from their wives by saying, 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother,' and then go back on what they have said, must atone by freeing a slave before the couple may resume their full marital relation. This is an admonition to you, and God is fully aware of all that you do. However, he who does not have the means shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may resume their full marital relation; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy people; this, so that you may prove your faith in God and His Messenger. Such are the bounds set by God. Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe." (58: 1-4)
>
> The Prophet then said to me: "Tell him to free a slave." I said: "Messenger of God! He does not have the means to do so." He said: "Then let him fast two consecutive months." I said: "He is certainly an old man who cannot fast." He said: "He should then feed sixty poor people with a *wasq*[4] of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! By God, he cannot afford that." The Prophet then said: "We will help him, then, with a sack of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! I, too, will help him with another sack." The Prophet said: "That is good and kind of you. Go and give this to charity on his behalf, and take good care of your cousin." I did as the Prophet told me. (Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.)[5]

This case illustrates the degree of involvement by God's Messenger in the life of the Muslim community throughout those twenty-three years of revelation. This involves a case of a simple woman and her old and weak husband who had an argument that led to an untenable situation. The solution came directly from God, who said that He had listened to her complaint. Those years of assistance provided by God's Messenger to the first Muslim community were necessary, as they provided practical guidance that has been studied by scholars over the years so that proper implementation of Divine guidance in different times and environments is made easy and straightforward. They also gave God's Messenger the necessary time to mould a coherent society, united by its faith and advocacy of the Divine message, out of an unruly tribal society where unwarranted raids were common practice. The Muslim society that the Prophet moulded over this period was well equipped to carry God's message to mankind and to initiate the Islamic civilization that was to lead humanity for many centuries.

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[4] A *wasq* is a measure of volume estimated to weigh about 130 kilograms of wheat.

[5] Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, vol. 16, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2009, pp. 393-394.

CHAPTER 5

MUHAMMAD: GOD'S MESSENGER

MUHAMMAD (peace be upon him) clearly understood his role as God's Messenger. He was aware that it meant that he had to deliver God's message and make it known to all. One of his young Companions, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr, expressed that the message of God's Oneness is given so that it will open eyes that have been blind, ears that could not hear and hearts that have been sealed. God's message thus opens all human faculties of perception to the great truth in the universe, which is God's Oneness. In other words, the Prophet needed to make people understand that God is the Creator of the universe and everything in it and to appreciate what this entailed for them: that they must submit themselves to Him alone and to conduct their lives in the way that is consistent with such submission. As God's Messenger, Muhammad was to give to mankind clear concepts of God, man, and the relation between the two, as well as explaining what the end of life on earth will mean for every person.

Muhammad, a man who lived for forty years among his people and earned their respect for his good manners and integrity, was required to tell them that he was chosen by God to be His Messenger, and that he was giving them God's message. What sort of reaction could he expect? How would people view a man who tells them that he has a special relationship with God, and therefore has authority over them? How will they feel when he orders them to change their ways in order not to incur God's displeasure. He actually told them that unless they obeyed him, they exposed themselves to God's severe punishment. Given the implications of this message, it is to be expected that the people would want proof of his claims.

The Prophet repeatedly faced demands for material proof to confirm his position as God's Messenger. The people wanted this proof to clearly indicate that it came directly from God Himself. When he told them that it was God only

who decides to show a miraculous sign, they met his answer with ridicule and hurting accusations. The Qur'ān tells us about such demands:

> They also say: "What sort of Messenger is this, who eats food and goes about in the market-places? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give warning alongside him? Or why has not a treasure been granted to him? Or he should have a garden to provide his sustenance." The wrongdoers say: "The man you follow is certainly bewitched." (25: 7-8)

When the situation in Makkah became polarized between those who fiercely opposed him and those who accepted his message, the former persistently attempted to suppress Islam altogether, and their demands for miracles became too absurd to merit a reply. The Qur'ān mentions these demands:

> They say: "We shall not believe in you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or you have a garden of date-palms and vines, and you cause rivers to flow through it, or you cause the sky to fall upon us in pieces, as you have threatened, or you bring God and the angels face to face before us, or you have a house of gold, or you ascend to heaven. Indeed we shall not believe in your ascent to heaven until you bring us a book for us to read." Say, "Limitless in His glory is my Lord. Surely I am only a man and a Messenger." (17: 90-93)

Needless to say, had the Prophet been given anything like what those Arab unbelievers demanded, they would have still denied his message. Treasures, splendid farms and gardens are owned by ordinary people, but their huge wealth does not qualify them to any special status. Likewise, if the Prophet were to produce something miraculous, such as causing springs to gush forth from the earth, those unbelievers would still have claimed that he was a sorcerer, just like unbelievers before them had alleged about their own Prophets and Messengers. Some unbelievers accused him of sorcery anyway. The point here is that miraculous proof is not lacking: all around us there are miraculous signs pointing to God as the Creator of all. These signs are in the birth of every child, in every seed that brings up a plant or a tree, in every flower that opens up to spread its scent and in every little and great creature of whatever make-up. Proper reflection on what we see around us is all that is needed to realize that behind it all is the hand of God, the Creator. Had it been necessary to have a material miracle in order for us to believe, our belief would become meaningless. There is little merit in understanding that a table is made by a carpenter, a car by a

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mechanical engineer or a computer by a hardware engineer. We may have study courses and manuals to show the technology involved in making anything in human society; but we cannot fathom how God creates life in any of its forms.

The Prophet told the people that they must believe in God's Oneness. That is a conscious step that man takes, and it requires commitment to what such belief entails. To help the people to arrive at the decision to take this step, God sent a message containing guidance as well as a proof that is consistent with human nature and is logically acceptable. Nevertheless, it remained up to each person to take that step, which must be taken freely and without any pressure or hindrance by any party. When the majority of the people of Makkah opposed the Prophet and tried to force his followers to renounce their faith, the Prophet's reply was only to ask them to allow him to advocate his message freely, speaking to other tribes. All he wanted was a platform to address people and freedom of choice for all.

Heavy Responsibility

The Prophet was warned at the outset that his task would not be easy. In a very early Qur'ānic revelation, God told him: "We shall bestow on you a weighty message." (73: 5) The Prophet understood that he would bear a heavy responsibility. The difficulty of the task was not in the delivery of the message, as he was well equipped for that task with a talent of smooth expression, great command of language, well-reasoned argument and a noble character that was acknowledged by all who knew him. Rather, he understood from that statement that there would be strong opposition to him and to his message. Hence, he told his wife Khadījah, when she one night told him to take some rest: "Khadījah, the time of restful sleep is over." He realized that he was no longer master of his own time; he needed to attend to his mission at every moment of day and night, and he proved to be up to the task.

This poses the question of how much a man can take in order to fulfil his task as God's Messenger. What burden did Muhammad undertake to carry when he accepted his role? In the very early days, Muhammad went to see Waraqah ibn Nawfal, the elderly scholar of Divine religions, seeking reassurance about what he had seen in his first encounter with Gabriel. Waraqah told Muhammad that he would meet much hostility. Indeed, Muhammad endured much personal abuse. He was insulted, ridiculed and vilified. He was also accused of being a sorcerer, a madman, a poet who indulged in exaggerations and a monk who was isolated from life. In fact, the list of accusations is almost endless. Physical abuse was a constant threat to him, although the protection his uncle extended

to him through thick and thin reduced this somewhat. Whenever the hardliners of the Quraysh felt they could get away with personal abuse toward the Prophet, they had no qualms about it. They threw dirt on him as he was praying near the Ka'bah, and he could not lift his head until his young daughter arrived to help him. They tried to assassinate him on more than one occasion. Ultimately, he had to flee his hometown. Yet, all this was easier for him to bear than to see his followers being subjected to torture and physical abuse of the worst kind.

Exemplary Forbearance

The Prophet realized that he had to bear all this, and much more, without resorting to retaliation for any personal injury, even for physical assault. For example, Anas ibn Mālik reports:

> I was walking with God's Messenger when he was wearing a coat with a rough edge. A Bedouin caught up with him and pulled him hard. I looked at the Prophet's neck and saw how the edge of his coat left a clear mark on his skin, because of the Bedouin's rough attitude. Then the Bedouin said to him: "Muhammad, give orders that I should have a portion of the money God has given you." The Prophet looked at him, and then issued the necessary order for him to be given his share. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The Bedouin wanted some money and he thought that the Prophet should give it to him. However, rather than ask in a proper manner and show the Prophet the respect to which he was entitled, he instead very roughly pulled on the Prophet's coat. Nevertheless, the Prophet did not say to him a word of reproach; instead, he ordered a gift for him.

Overlooking people's faults – even when these were directed at him personally – was an unfailing characteristic of the Prophet. He felt that he needed to give up every personal consideration for his mission. Therefore, he did not involve himself in any personal disputes and he overlooked any offending action or remark that was directed toward him from either Muslims or non-Muslims. When he was in Makkah, where some people were always ready with their insults, he never replied to any of them. Later in Madinah, where he wielded all authority and his followers were ready to do whatever he bid them, he was even more forgiving and accommodating.

For example, a Jew called Zayd ibn Sa'nah was standing nearby when the Prophet received an urgent request to send relief supplies to a certain community

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For example, a Jew called Zayd ibn Sa'nah was standing nearby when the Prophet received an urgent request to send relief supplies to a certain community

who lived at some distance from Madinah. When the Prophet enquired, he was told that nothing was readily available to send. The Jew then offered a handsome amount of money to the Prophet to obtain relief supplies, on the agreement that this money would serve as an advance payment for a quantity of dates to be delivered to the Jew at a certain date. He wanted the dates from a particular farm, but the Prophet agreed to accept the offer only if the Jew would not insist on that farm, and on these conditions the deal was made.

The Jew reported that two or three days before the agreed time, the Prophet and a number of his Companions attended the funeral of a man from the Anṣār. After offering the prayer for the deceased, the Prophet sat next to a wall:

> I came over to him and held him by his robes. I looked hard at him and said: "Muhammad, will you not pay up what is due to me by right? I have known your clan to honour their commitments, and I have dealt with some of you." I looked at ʿUmar and saw his eyes shifting like a ball. He looked hard at me and said: "You enemy of God! How dare you say and do to God's Messenger what I have heard and seen? By Him who sent him with the message of the truth, had it not been for the risk that I will miss out on what I am keen to have, I would have struck off your neck with this sword of mine." God's Messenger looked calmly at ʿUmar and said to him: "We are in need of something better from you, ʿUmar. It would have been better that you tell me to honour my commitment and tell him to make his demand in an appropriate way. Take him and give him all that is due to him. Give him also 20 measures of dates extra, in consideration of scaring him.' ʿUmar went out with me and gave me what was due to me and the increase. I asked him the reason for this extra amount. He said: "God's Messenger has instructed me to give you this in consideration for having scared you." (Related by al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

This was an unwarranted public insult, as the Prophet had not defaulted on the agreement: the Jew had made his demand a couple of days before the due date. Rather than protesting the fact, however, the Prophet gave instructions to give the man his dues with an additional gift. The man chosen to do so was the one who was ready to kill the Jew for the insult he directed at the Prophet. The Prophet wanted to teach ʿUmar a better way of handling such a situation, pointing out first a better course of action than to scare the man: "It would have been better that you tell me to honour my commitment and tell him to make his demand in an appropriate way."

The story so far sounds strange: why should the Jew behave in this way when the agreed time of settlement was still a couple of days away? He himself provides the answer as he speaks to ʿUmar after the latter explained to him why he gave him more than what he was due. He mentioned his name, Zayd ibn Saʿnah, and confirmed that he was a well known rabbi. Amazed, ʿUmar asked him why he behaved in that manner. He said:

> "When I saw Muhammad, I recognized in his face all the signs confirming prophethood as they are mentioned in our scriptures, except for two aspects that I needed to test. These are: that his forbearance controls his anger and that the more harshness is shown to him the more forbearing he is. I did what I did as a test and I have confirmed both. Therefore, I would like you, ʿUmar, to be my witness that I believe in God as my Lord, and that I am happy to follow Islam as my faith and Muhammad as the Prophet. I also want you to be my witness that I am allocating half my wealth – and I am one of the wealthiest here – as charity for Muhammad's community." ʿUmar said: "Or rather for some of them, because you cannot give them all." The two went back together to the Prophet where Zayd ibn Saʿnah declared himself a Muslim. He took part in several expeditions with the Prophet.

We cannot pinpoint the time when the first incident took place, but we can say that it was when the Prophet had settled in Madinah and Bedouins used to come to him for help. The episode with the Jewish rabbi was in the early years of the Prophet's immigration to Madinah, when the Muslim state was still poor. When things were better and the Muslim community enjoyed a more comfortable life, the Prophet maintained his attitude of forbearance and overlooking people's mistakes. Some mistakes came from Muslims who were probably newcomers to Islam and who therefore did not understand the Prophet's position and character. They might have been drawn to Islam when its fortunes were on the rise, hoping to make some material gain. The Prophet would overlook their offensive remarks or their lack of manners.

The following example took place a little over two years before the end of the Prophet's blessed life, that is, when the Muslim state was held in awe by all Arabs. After the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Prophet gave generous gifts to some Arabs whom he hoped to win their wholehearted support. These gifts came from the spoils of war. The Islamic rule concerning such war gains is that eighty percent is shared by the army who fought the battle that provided the booty, while twenty percent goes to the state. During the Prophet's lifetime, he was the

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head of the state, and he saw to it that this latter portion of the spoils of war went to the poor and the general welfare of the state and the Muslim community. This meant that its spending was subject to the Prophet's sole discretion. After the Prophet, a Muslim ruler decides on the ways of its spending for the welfare of the Muslim community. ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd mentioned that when the Prophet gave those generous gifts to those people a man said:

> "This division is unfair. It is not made to please God." I thought I must report this to the Prophet. I told him. He commented: "Who will be fair if God and His Messenger are unfair? May God bestow mercy on Moses; he suffered more abuse and he took it all in his stride." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Delivering God's Message

As God's Messenger, Muhammad was required to deliver God's message. Since it was addressed to all mankind, how was he to deliver it? Consider his position in Makkah, at the heart of a vast desert peninsula, at a time when no means of communication or interaction with people was available except the personal one, whether oral or written. That was the weighty message he was given and he proved himself to be up to the task. The way he went about advocating the Islamic faith suggests that he addressed individuals, groups, communities and the world. He neither belittled a small task nor shrank from a huge one.

In the early years in Makkah, the Prophet spoke to people in groups and individually. He explained his message to anyone who would care to listen. He told them that he was God's Messenger and explained to them the essence of the Islamic faith. He was never deterred by an offensive remark, accusation or outright rejection. He made it clear to everyone he spoke to that he asked for nothing other than the chance to explain to them the message he was required to give them: they were free to make their decision. When hostility to him and his message became ferocious and the Quraysh warned all comers and visitors to Makkah against him, he still sought individual visitors and went to the encampments of all tribes during the pilgrimage season. He tried to take his message to another city, Taif, where he met with even more hostile opposition, although he did not complain at the time. He later expressed his feelings, and stated that the hardest aspect for him was that he would go out in the morning and speak to people, wherever he met them, and would spend several hours with no one giving him a good word, only harsh rebuffs. Despite all this, he established a second base for his message in a far away country, Abyssinia, because he knew

that its king, the Negus, was a fair-minded ruler. Thus, even in Makkah where he had only a small community of followers, he took his message to individuals from his own city, to other Arabian tribes, and he also made an international address.

In Madinah, when he had a much larger community and was facing armies who were trying to stifle his message and even exterminate his community, he would welcome any individual and give them his full attention, explaining the message of Islam. He would not delay answering a person's request for information about Islam for any reason whatsoever. Abū Rifāʿah, a Bedouin, reports:

> I arrived at the Prophet's mosque when he was delivering a sermon. I said: "Messenger of God, here is a stranger who has come to enquire about the faith, as he knows nothing about it." The Prophet came over to me, abandoning his sermon, until he reached me. A chair, with perhaps iron legs, was brought to him. He sat on the chair and spoke to me teaching me something of what God has taught him. He then resumed his sermon until he finished it. (Related by Muslim.)

The Prophet's attitude can be contrasted with the strict manners that are traditionally adopted when a speaker is giving a speech, lecture or sermon. This is not to suggest that people should be allowed to interrupt speakers with questions that may be at variance with their subject; it simply shows the sort of importance the Prophet attached to ensuring that God's message was delivered to all people, and most importantly to those who asked about it. His attitude here is not dissimilar to that of a medical doctor responding to an emergency. Whoever enquired about Islam, whether they were concerned with the essentials or the details, found a ready response from the Prophet who encouraged everyone to learn. To instruct people in the faith of Islam was his mission, and he was eager to fulfil it as best as he could.

In another example, a woman called Asmā' bint Yazīd ibn al-Sakan said to the Prophet:

> "Messenger of God, I am speaking on behalf of a group of Muslim women who all share my view. God has sent you as a Messenger to both men and women. We believed in you and followed you. However, we, women, are housewives and we stay at home. We gratify men's desires and bear their children. Men have the privilege of attending Friday prayers and funerals, as well as taking part in jihad expeditions. When they go on such an expedition, we look after their properties and take care of

head of the state, and he saw to it that this latter portion of the spoils of war went to the poor and the general welfare of the state and the Muslim community. This meant that its spending was subject to the Prophet's sole discretion. After the Prophet, a Muslim ruler decides on the ways of its spending for the welfare of the Muslim community. ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd mentioned that when the Prophet gave those generous gifts to those people a man said:

> "This division is unfair. It is not made to please God." I thought I must report this to the Prophet. I told him. He commented: "Who will be fair if God and His Messenger are unfair? May God bestow mercy on Moses; he suffered more abuse and he took it all in his stride." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

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their children. Do we have a share of their reward for these, Messenger of God?" The Prophet turned towards his Companions and said: "Have you ever heard a woman putting her question about her religion in a better way than this lady?" They said: "This is absolutely true, Messenger of God." He said: "You may go now, Asmā', and tell all women that when any of you looks after her home and takes care of her husband, making sure to please him, she receives equal reward for all you have mentioned of men's privileges." Asmā' left, expressing her pleasure at what God's Messenger had told her by praising and glorifying God.[1]

Speaking to people individually or in groups, including addressing tribes and communities, was coupled with a continuous process of educating his Companions and smoothing out the 'rough edges' in their characters, so that Islam could produce out of those rough desert Arabs a nation that took human civilization to new heights. However, the Prophet was God's Messenger to all mankind, and he had to deliver God's message beyond Arabia. Therefore, when the immediate threat to the Muslim state was neutralized with signing the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement with the Quraysh and the victory over the Jews of Khaybar, the Prophet sent messages to the rulers of all countries around Arabia, including the Emperors of the two superpowers of his time: Persia and Byzantium. He wrote to them, calling on them to believe in God's Oneness and acknowledge his message. He stated that otherwise they bore responsibility before God for themselves and their nations. By doing so, he ensured that Islam was talked about in a very large area of the world. Future events showed that much of this area would become Muslim.[2]

No Personal Considerations

An important aspect of what Muhammad, as God's Messenger, had to endure in connection with delivering the message is seen in the fact that he had to state everything that came to him from God, regardless of how it affected him or reflected on him personally. We need to remember that the Qur'ān is God's own word, and that it will remain unchanged for the rest of time, as God has guaranteed its preservation. Indeed, it is recited in prayer and for worship every day of the life of every Muslim. Therefore, when it mentions something about

[1] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Istīʿāb fī Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb*, vol. 4, published together with Ibn Ḥajar's *Al-Iṣābah*, Beirut, 1328 AH, p. 237.

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the Prophet, its statement is read out at all times as an act of worship. In this light, for example, we can read the following verses:

> This [Qur'ān] is a revelation from the Lord of all the worlds. Had he[3] attributed some fabrications to Us, We would indeed have seized him by the right hand and cut off his life-vein, and none of you could have saved him. This [Qur'ān] is indeed a reminder to the God-fearing (69: 43-48)

The fact that Muhammad recited this revelation to his Companions and to his enemies, that he read it out in prayer time after time, and that it is part of the Qur'ān is in itself a proof – if proof is needed – that the Qur'ān is God's word and that Muhammad was God's Messenger.

Another example is the case of the blind man who came to the Prophet when he was still in Makkah, and asked to learn something about Islam. The Prophet was busy with a group of the nobility of the Quraysh, telling them about his message and hoping that they would become Muslims. He was displeased at the blind man's interruption. Apparently that showed in his face, although the blind man could not see it. The Prophet did not express his displeasure by word or gesture: he merely felt displeased. Anyone could appreciate the Prophet's feelings. He was attending to a task that he hoped would bring much needed support to the cause of Islam. To be interrupted by a poor blind man whom he could teach at any other time was not very pleasant. Yet the Prophet was censured by God for his attitude:

> He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him. How could you tell? He might have sought to purify himself. He might have been reminded and the reminder might have profited him. But to the one who considered himself self-sufficient you were all attention. Yet the fault would not be yours if he remained uncleansed. As to him who comes to you with zeal, and with a feeling of fear in his heart, him you ignore. No indeed! This is an admonition. Let him who will, bear it in mind. (80: 1-12)

By human standards, what the Prophet did was not reprehensible in any way. After all, the blind man could not see the expression on the Prophet's face. The Prophet simply continued to attend to what he thought was the more important and immediate task in service of his message. God, however, wanted

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something else: He wanted to change perspectives and values. The person who comes willingly to learn about Islam should be treated as far more important than people turning away from it, even though there is hope that they will see its truth. This is a principle that should be clearly stated so that it is implemented by all advocates of Islam, for the rest of time. The Qur'ān states it and, therefore, the Prophet should declare it. For the rest of his life, the Prophet would say to that blind man, whenever he met him: "A warm welcome to the one for whose sake my Lord remonstrated with me." On more than one occasion, he appointed him as his deputy in Madinah to run the affairs of the Muslim community in his absence.

The clearest example of disregarding personal considerations, when it came to stating what is related to his message, is what happened the morning after the Prophet's night journey. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Prophet was one night taken by the angel Gabriel from Makkah to Jerusalem, where he met all of God's earlier Messengers and led them in prayer. He was then taken to heaven, and returned to Makkah before dawn. Would he tell the people of Makkah about his remarkable journey? He first informed his cousin in whose house he was sleeping that night before and after his journey. As he was about to leave, she warned him that he must not tell anyone, because she feared that they would shrink in disbelief. He then left her and went to the Ka'bah where he offered his prayer.

As he finished his worship, his most hardened opponent, Abū Jahl, came over to ask for any news. He immediately told him that he was taken on a journey to Jerusalem. Rather than accusing him of lying, Abū Jahl asked whether he was prepared to say the same to other people. The Prophet confirmed that he would. Within a few minutes Abū Jahl gathered a large number of people to hear the Prophet's strange tale. With undoubted assurance, he told them that he went to Jerusalem and came back that night. Accusations of lying immediately flew at him from all corners. People were saying, "a trade caravan takes a month on the outbound trip and a month on the return trip. How could you do it all within one night?" Soon Abū Bakr was brought over to hear the strange tale. He confirmed that he believed it all: "I believe him when he says something more unusual, as he tells us that he receives revelations from on high."

Care and Compassion

The Prophet's top priority was attending to the needs of God's message and explaining it to the people, and he was always ready to do whatever was needed

for that purpose. He was prepared to endure any hardship involved: his personal comfort was of little concern to him, as long as he fulfilled the task assigned to him by God. His attitude towards the people of Makkah in particular was one of care and compassion. He feared their inevitable destiny if they were to persist in opposing God's message and remain idolaters. He was like one who sees a blind man heading towards a precipice and tries to direct him away from it. Indeed, God mentions this in the Qur'ān: "Would you, perhaps, torment yourself to death [with grief] because they would not believe?" (26: 3) Indeed he was so eager that people should understand the truth of Islam and accept it that he would have done anything to achieve that. Yet many people remained in active opposition for many years, plotting his assassination several times and sending armies to invade his base and exterminate him and his followers. When his victory was total, and was achieved with very little fighting, his detractors were under his mercy, yet he pardoned them all. He entertained no thought of revenge, neither for himself nor for his Muslim community. He always had in mind that he taught by example. He was fully aware that revenge is shunned by Islam. Leading by example is the role of the advocates of Islam, as they follow the lead given them by the Prophet.

God's Promises

The Prophet thus made the delivery of God's message his top priority, and he communicated it to individuals, communities and other states. A question may arise about his personal position with regard to what was required of him. The Prophet received Qur'ānic revelations, which he learnt by heart. He caused them to be written down and checked the accuracy of the written text. He recited them to his Companions and encouraged them to commit the revelations to memory. This was all part of the process of the preservation of the Qur'ān. In addition, he was given certain promises and orders. Let us look at how he dealt with these.

When the Prophet received a promise from on high, he had absolute confidence in its fulfilment. Some of these promises could have never been given by anyone other than God, and there was no way any human could see how they would be fulfilled.

For example, the Prophet was told: "God will protect you from all people." (5: 67) This is a guarantee that no earthly power could offer. How did the Prophet react? Prior to the revelation of this verse, some of his Companions took turns in staying with the Prophet as bodyguard. When this verse was revealed to him,

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he ordered them to leave,[4] as no one was needed to serve in that capacity any more. That shows his full trust in the promise he received. Similarly, one day, the Prophet was asleep under a tree. On waking up, he saw a stranger standing close to him with a sword in his hand. The stranger lifted the sword, ready to strike. He then said: "Muhammad, who can save you now?" The Prophet replied: "God." The sword fell to the ground. The Prophet picked it up and said to the man: "Who can save *you* now?" The man said: "You can be the noblest of opponents." The Prophet let him go free.

> Another example can be seen when after the Battle of Khaybar against the Jews, the Prophet married Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy. She had lost her husband during the battle, and her father had been executed by the Muslims less then eighteen months earlier. He was one of the most hardened enemies of Islam and the Prophet. The marriage was solemnized on the Prophet's way back to Madinah, after she had finished her waiting period. She was offered a choice of being set free or marrying the Prophet and she chose marriage. When the Prophet came out of his tent in the morning, he saw Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī standing guard near the tent. He asked him the reason for him standing there. Abū Ayyūb said: "You have married this woman and we have just defeated her people. I feared that she might do you some harm." The Prophet thanked him and prayed for him. Abū Ayyūb was rightly worried, considering what Ṣafiyyah might feel towards Islam and the Prophet. The Prophet, however, had no worries whatsoever.[5]

Likewise, in the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslim army was soon in chaos, with people moving in opposite directions. The Prophet was left with very few of his relatives and Companions. Rather than trying to move away from the field, considering that he would be the top target for the enemy, he kept moving close to the enemy army, repeating very loudly: "I am the Prophet; that is the truth. I am ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's son."[6] All these incidents show that the Prophet had absolute trust in the fulfilment of God's promise.

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[4] Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* (Book of Qur'ānic Commentary). See also, Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Maʿād*, vol 1, Beirut, 1994, p. 127.

[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 392. See also, Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 4, p. 233.

[6] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar* (chapter titled "Leading someone else's mount in battle").

This promise of protection was stated in the Qur'ān and known to all people, Muslim and non-Muslim. However, other promises were given to the Prophet in different forms and were known only to him. He could have kept these secret, particularly those that indicated major events on the world stage, but he informed others of these: showing, again, his absolute trust in their fulfilment.

In year five of the Islamic calendar (627 CE) the Muslim state in Madinah was still very poor and threatened by several forces. A confederation of hostile Arabian tribes and Jews made a pact and moved quickly towards Madinah, with the declared aim of exterminating Islam and the Muslims. On receiving intelligence of their march, the Prophet approved the digging of a wide dry moat across the entrance to Madinah. He and all Muslims worked hard to complete the digging of the moat before the arrival of the enemy. Al-Barā' ibn ʿĀzib reports:

> During the digging of the moat, we encountered a large rock which could not be broken by our axes. We reported it to the Prophet and he came down. He took an axe and said "in God's name" before he struck the rock. He broke one third of it. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Syria. I can see its red palaces from this place." He then said "in God's name" and struck the rock again, breaking another one-third of it. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Persia, and from this place of mine I can see al-Madā'in and its white palace," [that is, the Emperor's palace]. Again he said "in God's name" and struck the rock, clearing its final part. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Yemen, and I can see the gates of Sanaa from this my place." (Related by Aḥmad in *Al-Musnad*.)

One of the hypocrites heard what the Prophet said. He remarked to his mates: "Muhammad is promising us the Emperor's palace when we are too scared even to go to the toilet." This vividly describes the Prophet's trust in God's promise that he would tell his Companions what he was promised at a time when they were in fear of being overwhelmed by an enemy that could not even think of standing up to the might of Persia. Within four years, Yemen submitted to Islam, and barely two decades passed before Syria and Persia came under Muslim rule, with a large portion of their populations becoming Muslim.

The Prophet was also given orders relating to the affairs of the state and to his own affairs. In both cases, he carried out these orders without any hesitation. It was his practice to consult his Companions about all situations, allowing everyone to express their views before a decision is made. However, when he received

he ordered them to leave,[4] as no one was needed to serve in that capacity any more. That shows his full trust in the promise he received. Similarly, one day, the Prophet was asleep under a tree. On waking up, he saw a stranger standing close to him with a sword in his hand. The stranger lifted the sword, ready to strike. He then said: "Muhammad, who can save you now?" The Prophet replied: "God." The sword fell to the ground. The Prophet picked it up and said to the man: "Who can save *you* now?" The man said: "You can be the noblest of opponents." The Prophet let him go free.

> Another example can be seen when after the Battle of Khaybar against the Jews, the Prophet married Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy. She had lost her husband during the battle, and her father had been executed by the Muslims less then eighteen months earlier. He was one of the most hardened enemies of Islam and the Prophet. The marriage was solemnized on the Prophet's way back to Madinah, after she had finished her waiting period. She was offered a choice of being set free or marrying the Prophet and she chose marriage. When the Prophet came out of his tent in the morning, he saw Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī standing guard near the tent. He asked him the reason for him standing there. Abū Ayyūb said: "You have married this woman and we have just defeated her people. I feared that she might do you some harm." The Prophet thanked him and prayed for him. Abū Ayyūb was rightly worried, considering what Ṣafiyyah might feel towards Islam and the Prophet. The Prophet, however, had no worries whatsoever.[5]

Likewise, in the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslim army was soon in chaos, with people moving in opposite directions. The Prophet was left with very few of his relatives and Companions. Rather than trying to move away from the field, considering that he would be the top target for the enemy, he kept moving close to the enemy army, repeating very loudly: "I am the Prophet; that is the truth. I am ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's son."[6] All these incidents show that the Prophet had absolute trust in the fulfilment of God's promise.

[4] Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* (Book of Qur'ānic Commentary). See also, Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Maʿād*, vol 1, Beirut, 1994, p. 127.

[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 392. See also, Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 4, p. 233.

[6] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar* (chapter titled "Leading someone else's mount in battle").

This promise of protection was stated in the Qur'ān and known to all people, Muslim and non-Muslim. However, other promises were given to the Prophet in different forms and were known only to him. He could have kept these secret, particularly those that indicated major events on the world stage, but he informed others of these: showing, again, his absolute trust in their fulfilment.

In year five of the Islamic calendar (627 CE) the Muslim state in Madinah was still very poor and threatened by several forces. A confederation of hostile Arabian tribes and Jews made a pact and moved quickly towards Madinah, with the declared aim of exterminating Islam and the Muslims. On receiving intelligence of their march, the Prophet approved the digging of a wide dry moat across the entrance to Madinah. He and all Muslims worked hard to complete the digging of the moat before the arrival of the enemy. Al-Barā' ibn ʿĀzib reports:

> During the digging of the moat, we encountered a large rock which could not be broken by our axes. We reported it to the Prophet and he came down. He took an axe and said "in God's name" before he struck the rock. He broke one third of it. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Syria. I can see its red palaces from this place." He then said "in God's name" and struck the rock again, breaking another one-third of it. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Persia, and from this place of mine I can see al-Madā'in and its white palace," [that is, the Emperor's palace]. Again he said "in God's name" and struck the rock, clearing its final part. He said: "All glory belongs to God. I have been given the keys to Yemen, and I can see the gates of Sanaa from this my place." (Related by Aḥmad in *Al-Musnad*.)

One of the hypocrites heard what the Prophet said. He remarked to his mates: "Muhammad is promising us the Emperor's palace when we are too scared even to go to the toilet." This vividly describes the Prophet's trust in God's promise that he would tell his Companions what he was promised at a time when they were in fear of being overwhelmed by an enemy that could not even think of standing up to the might of Persia. Within four years, Yemen submitted to Islam, and barely two decades passed before Syria and Persia came under Muslim rule, with a large portion of their populations becoming Muslim.

The Prophet was also given orders relating to the affairs of the state and to his own affairs. In both cases, he carried out these orders without any hesitation. It was his practice to consult his Companions about all situations, allowing everyone to express their views before a decision is made. However, when he received

an order from on high, he went ahead to implement it without consulting anyone. For example, when Yathrib (later called Madinah) was receiving the Muslim immigrants, the Prophet stayed behind, awaiting God's instructions. When he was told to immigrate, he immediately went to Abū Bakr's place at midday (when hardly anyone moved around in Makkah because of the intense heat) and told him to get ready. They proceeded that night, and the Prophet left behind his wife, Sawdah, and his daughters. He would never consider delay, not even to finalize his preparations.

Six years later, when he travelled with his Companions to Makkah, intending to perform the *ʿUmrah* (i.e. the lesser pilgrimage), the Quraysh stopped them and made it clear that it would prevent them entry, even if this necessitated the use of force. Acting on Divine orders, the Prophet held negotiations with the Quraysh without consulting any of his Companions. He agreed to all the conditions made by the Quraysh, despite the fact that they apparently worked against the interests of the Muslims. This caused a stir among his Companions, some of whom were seriously perturbed at the Prophet's attitude. He simply said to them: "I am God's servant and Messenger. I will not disobey Him and He will not abandon me."[7]

These were state matters, but the Prophet behaved in the same way when Divine instructions touched on his personal life. He never hesitated to implement these instructions, or indeed to exercise a special concession given to him, despite its being disallowed to other Muslims. The clearest examples are those of his marriages. All Muslims are permitted no more than four wives at the same time. This did not apply to the Prophet, who could marry as many as he wished, and he did so without hesitation. Likewise, his marriage to Zaynab was contrary to the established custom in Arabia. Chapter 14 in this book is devoted to his marriages.

Calling on God to Witness

The Prophet was fully aware of what his role as God's Messenger involved. In his comprehensive speech during his farewell pilgrimage, he outlined to the people the main principles of Islam: highlighting aspects of action that needed to be adhered to or avoided. Those who went with him on that pilgrimage numbered up to 250,000, and he ensured that they were all aware of what he said. Several times during that speech, he asked his audience: "Have I delivered my message?"

[7] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 365. Also, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book on *Al-Jihād wa'l-Siyar* (chapter on violating treaties).

They answered: "Yes, you most certainly have." He then said: "My Lord, be my witness."[8] The fact that his message has survived, intact, for fourteen centuries is the best evidence that he has delivered it in full. This message is certain to survive to the end of time, because God has guaranteed to keep the Qur'ān free of distortion for as long as humans continue to populate the earth.

[8] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book on Pilgrimage (Chapter on the Prophet's pilgrimage). See also, Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 276.

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CHAPTER 6

PROOFS OF PROPHETHOOD

IMĀM IBN ḤAZM defines prophethood as the "the acquisition of absolutely certain knowledge that cannot be acquired through human endeavour or experience." Such knowledge can only come from God. This is clear in the case of several Prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān. For example, when speaking of the young David and what God was to give him when He made him a Prophet, the Qur'ān says: "David slew Goliath, and God bestowed on him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him whatever He willed." (2: 251) Likewise, when Joseph was attaining adulthood, God gave him both knowledge and wisdom: "When he attained his full manhood, We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge." (12: 22) The knowledge given to Moses is described in very similar words: "When he attained his full manhood and became fully mature, We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge." (28: 14) The Prophet is reminded in the Qur'ān of the special knowledge granted him by God: "It is God who has bestowed this book on you from on high and given you wisdom, and has taught you what you did not know. God's favour on you is great indeed." (4: 113)

All Prophets were given knowledge that they could not have acquired by any means available to human beings. The mark of prophethood is that such knowledge must be true, and subject to no doubt. One of the clearest examples can be found in the instructions given to Moses' mother when she gave birth to him. At the time, Pharaoh was killing every male child born to the Israelites. The Qur'ān states:

> We inspired your mother, saying: "Place [your child] in a chest and throw it into the river. The river will cast him ashore, and one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him will pick him up." (20: 38-39)

The Qur'ān provides further details:

> We revealed to the mother of Moses: "Breastfeed him, and then when you have cause to fear for him, cast him in the river, and have no fear and do not grieve. We shall restore him to you, and shall make him one of Our Messengers." (28: 7)

The information Moses' mother was given told her the steps to ensure that Moses would be safe. The first step after she had breastfed him was to expose him to multiple dangers: as a suckling baby he was to be placed in a wooden chest and thrown in the River Nile so that he would be picked up by an enemy. In that dangerous situation, he would not only be safe, but he would be reunited with his mother so that she could take care of him. No one could have given her such information; on the contrary, the plan of casting him in the river would have seemed preposterous to any wise person. However, she acted on it and every detail of the information given to her came true.

Such knowledge is given to the Prophets through revelations or inspiration. Muhammad's revelations were of two types: the Qur'ān, which is God's own word, and the *ḥadīth*, which is Divine revelation in meaning, expressed by the Prophet in his own style. I will not go into the distinctive features of either; although it is worth noting again that the Qur'ān has been preserved intact, with no differences in text or meaning ever since its revelation. This is in fulfilment of God's promise: "It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact." (15: 9) This statement is one of numerous proofs that the Qur'ān is God's word. No one could make this assertion, in such emphatic manner, about his or her own writing, or indeed about any book or document of any sort. More than fourteen centuries have passed since this promise was made, during which time the Muslim world has gone through many periods of trouble, war, occupation, chaos and even backwardness, but the Qur'ān remained intact throughout.

The Qur'ān contains knowledge that the Prophet could not have acquired through any human means. The opening of *Sūrah* 30, for example, refers to the defeat suffered by the Byzantine Empire at the hand of its rival superpower, the Persian Empire. At the time, the Prophet was still in Makkah, and was facing opposition from the unbelievers, who expressed their delight at the Persian victory because they felt their own idolatry to be closer to the dualism of the Persians than to the Byzantines' belief in one God. The *sūrah* begins as follows:

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> Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet despite this their defeat, they will gain victory within a few years. All power of decision belongs to God before and after. And on that day the believers will rejoice in God's support. He grants support to whomever He wills. He alone is Almighty, Merciful. (30: 2-5)

A Muslim does not consider this report of a future happening as a prophecy, but as true information given by God. Indeed, later events took place exactly as the Qur'ān foretold: in less than ten years, the Byzantines had achieved a remarkable victory over the Persians and recovered the land they had lost to them. On the same day, the Muslims achieved their great victory in the Battle of Badr, which was their first military encounter with the unbelievers. At the time when this *sūrah* was revealed, the number of Muslims was perhaps no more than 300, and none of them could have imagined that they would be engaged in a battle against anyone. We will understand this better if we remember that the Arabic word *naṣr*, which is rendered in the translation as "support", also means "victory", particularly of the military type.

Another example can be seen in the events that led to the signing of the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement between the Muslims and the Quraysh at the end of year 6 AH (628 CE). As explained in Chapter 2, the Prophet travelled with 1400 of his Companions to visit the Ka'bah in Makkah and offer worship there. The Quraysh denied them access. Eventually an agreement was signed between the two sides, requiring that the Muslims to go back. The Muslims would be allowed a three-day visit to Makkah the following year, provided that they carried no arms other than their individual swords. When the Prophet and his Companions started their return journey, God revealed *Sūrah* 48, which comments on these events. This includes a verse that speaks of what would happen a year hence:

> Most certainly you shall enter the Sacred Mosque, if God so wills, in full security, with your heads shaved or your hair cut short, without fear. God knew what you did not, and He granted you, besides this, a speedy victory. (48: 27)

The verse reassured the Muslims that their visit to Makkah would take place and that they would be safe there and able to complete their worship rituals (this is signalled by "heads shaved or your hair cut short"). No one other than God could make this assertion: How could the Prophet or anyone else speak of a visit "in full security"? How could anyone be certain of the attitude of the

Quraysh when the Muslims would have no arms other than their swords? Yet this is exactly what happened. The verse also promises "a speedy victory" in a situation other than this visit. This was a reference to the victory the Muslims achieved in the Battle of Khaybar, which took place about three months later. At the time when this verse was revealed, no one among the Muslims, not even the Prophet, was aware of any military conflict that would take place in the near future. The Qur'ān gave this promise, which was fulfilled exactly as stated.

Human Limitations

The Prophet always stressed his human status and that he was subject to the same limitations as all people. In a highly authentic *ḥadīth*, he gives his Companions this warning:

> I am only human and you put your disputes to me. A certain party may have a better sounding argument and I may think him to be telling the truth. I may then give a judgement in his favour according to what I have before me. If I give a person something that rightfully belongs to his brother, I am only giving him a piece of fire. He may take it or leave it. (Related by Mālik and also in all six authentic collections.)

He also stresses that he has no knowledge of what lies beyond the reach of human perception, except what is given to him by God: "Say: 'I do not say to you that God's treasures are with me; nor do I know what is beyond the reach of human perception'" (6: 50), and, "Had I possessed knowledge of what lies beyond the reach of human perception, I would have availed myself of much that is good and no evil would have ever touched me." (7: 188).

The fact that the Qur'ān gives information about future events, while at the same time emphasizing the human limitations of the Prophet who received the Qur'ān from on high, serves as irrefutable proof that the Qur'ān was revealed by God who alone knows everything in the past, present and future. Sometimes the Prophet gave people information that he could not acquire in any way other than Divine revelation. These were normally matters that they themselves took part in, and every person involved realized that the Prophet could not have had his information from a human source.

For example, 'Umayr ibn Wahb and Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah sat one night in the semicircle area next to the Ka'bah in Makkah and spoke sadly of the loss the Quraysh suffered at the hands of the Muslims in the Battle of Badr. They were all alone. They agreed that 'Umayr, who was a very courageous fighter, would travel

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to Madinah to attempt to kill Muhammad. Ṣafwān promised to repay ʿUmayr's debts and look after his family as his own if ʿUmayr came to any harm. Thus, ʿUmayr went to Madinah, and the Prophet instructed his Companions to admit him. The Prophet asked him why he came to Madinah, to which he responded that he only wanted to secure the release of his son who was taken prisoner in the Battle of Badr. The Prophet pressed him to tell him the truth, but he insisted that that was his purpose. The Prophet then recounted to him his conversation with Ṣafwān, word for word, including the promises each of them gave the other. We should remember here that this was fourteen centuries ago, a time when there were none of the rapid means of communications we have today. The only way news travelled was by word of mouth or by human Messengers who could travel only on horse- or camel-back. ʿUmayr immediately realized that the Prophet could only have been informed by a superior power. He declared his belief that Muhammad was God's Messenger and became a Muslim.[1]

Another example concerns al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Ḍirār, who was the chief of the Muṣṭalaq tribe that went to war against the Muslims. This tribe suffered a defeat and al-Ḥārith's daughter was among the prisoners of war. He travelled to Madinah to pay her ransom, which included some camels. Just before arriving in Madinah, he looked at the camels and felt sorry to part with two of them as they were of high quality. He hid them somewhere and went to Madinah without them. When he offered the Prophet the ransom he had brought with him, the Prophet asked him: "What about those two camels you hid at al-ʿAqīq, in such and such pathway?" Al-Ḥārith immediately said: "I fully believe that you are indeed God's Messenger. No one saw that other than God."[2]

> A third example relates to al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who was the Prophet's uncle. When the Prophet immigrated to Madinah, al-ʿAbbās remained in Makkah, giving the appearance that he continued to follow his people's idolatrous religion. However, there were two main reasons for his stay in Makkah: to provide the Prophet with up-to-date news of the Quraysh – who might decide at any time to fight against Islam – and to maintain the Hāshimite undertaking to provide drinking water to the pilgrims during the pilgrimage season. When the Quraysh raised its army, which fought the Battle of Badr, they forced al-ʿAbbās and other Hāshmites to join the army, as they did not want the Prophet's relatives to remain in peace in Makkah. When the Muslims won the battle, al-ʿAbbās was taken prisoner, together with two of his nephews Nawfal ibn al-Ḥārith and ʿAqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib, as well as his ally ʿUtbah ibn ʿAmr. The Prophet did not wish to treat them differently from other prisoners. Al-ʿAbbās was asked to pay the ransom for all four of them, but he said he did not have the money. The Prophet said: "What about the money you and your wife, Umm al-Faḍl, hid at home? You said to her: if I am killed, this money goes to my three sons: al-Faḍl, ʿAbdullāh and Qutham." Al-ʿAbbās said: "By God, I bear witness that you are God's Messenger. This is something known only to Umm al-Faḍl and myself."[3]

[1] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 306.
[2] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 3, p. 340.

These examples are some of the many cases where the Prophet gave people information that was known only to themselves, and which he could have gathered from no source that was accessible to any human being. Those who accepted the logical conclusion of this knowledge were quick to declare their acknowledgement that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a Prophet and a Messenger of God. They could not see any way of gathering such information, except through Divine action. There were others who may have seen such signs but refused to accept their logical conclusion. They were blinded by other considerations: such as their perceived interests, pride, position or even illogical prejudices. Others may have thought that they were doing Divine faith a favour in accepting it. The Qur'ān often refers to those who are driven away from faith by their arrogance. Abū Jahl, the Prophet's archenemy in Makkah, once explained his position very candidly, answering a friend's question about a passage of the Qur'ān they listened to. He said:

> I will tell you about what I heard! We have competed with the clan of ʿAbd Manāf for honours: they fed the poor, and we did the same; they provided generous support to those who needed it and we did the same. When we were together on the same level, like two racehorses running neck and neck, they said that one of their numbers was a Prophet receiving revelation from on high! When can we attain such an honour? By God, we shall never believe in him.[4]

It is important, therefore, to free ourselves from the prejudices that may becloud our vision or influence our thinking. The Prophet had no tangible miracles or material proof to show to people so that they would believe that he

[3] Al-Ḥākim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 324.
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to Madinah to attempt to kill Muhammad. Ṣafwān promised to repay ʿUmayr's debts and look after his family as his own if ʿUmayr came to any harm. Thus, ʿUmayr went to Madinah, and the Prophet instructed his Companions to admit him. The Prophet asked him why he came to Madinah, to which he responded that he only wanted to secure the release of his son who was taken prisoner in the Battle of Badr. The Prophet pressed him to tell him the truth, but he insisted that that was his purpose. The Prophet then recounted to him his conversation with Ṣafwān, word for word, including the promises each of them gave the other. We should remember here that this was fourteen centuries ago, a time when there were none of the rapid means of communications we have today. The only way news travelled was by word of mouth or by human Messengers who could travel only on horse- or camel-back. ʿUmayr immediately realized that the Prophet could only have been informed by a superior power. He declared his belief that Muhammad was God's Messenger and became a Muslim.[1]

Another example concerns al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Ḍirār, who was the chief of the Muṣṭalaq tribe that went to war against the Muslims. This tribe suffered a defeat and al-Ḥārith's daughter was among the prisoners of war. He travelled to Madinah to pay her ransom, which included some camels. Just before arriving in Madinah, he looked at the camels and felt sorry to part with two of them as they were of high quality. He hid them somewhere and went to Madinah without them. When he offered the Prophet the ransom he had brought with him, the Prophet asked him: "What about those two camels you hid at al-ʿAqīq, in such and such pathway?" Al-Ḥārith immediately said: "I fully believe that you are indeed God's Messenger. No one saw that other than God."[2]

> A third example relates to al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who was the Prophet's uncle. When the Prophet immigrated to Madinah, al-ʿAbbās remained in Makkah, giving the appearance that he continued to follow his people's idolatrous religion. However, there were two main reasons for his stay in Makkah: to provide the Prophet with up-to-date news of the Quraysh – who might decide at any time to fight against Islam – and to maintain the Hāshimite undertaking to provide drinking water to the pilgrims during the pilgrimage season. When the Quraysh raised its army, which fought the Battle of Badr, they forced al-ʿAbbās and other Hāshmites to join the army, as they did not want the Prophet's relatives to remain in peace in Makkah. When the Muslims won the battle, al-ʿAbbās was taken prisoner, together with two of his nephews Nawfal ibn al-Ḥārith and ʿAqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib, as well as his ally ʿUtbah ibn ʿAmr. The Prophet did not wish to treat them differently from other prisoners. Al-ʿAbbās was asked to pay the ransom for all four of them, but he said he did not have the money. The Prophet said: "What about the money you and your wife, Umm al-Faḍl, hid at home? You said to her: if I am killed, this money goes to my three sons: al-Faḍl, ʿAbdullāh and Qutham." Al-ʿAbbās said: "By God, I bear witness that you are God's Messenger. This is something known only to Umm al-Faḍl and myself."[3]

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was God's Messenger. Instead, he gave a simple message, based on God's Oneness and people's accountability on the Day of Judgement. People with open minds responded favourably, but most people followed their leaders, parents, friends or the community. Only some intelligence and openness of mind is needed in order to accept the message of Islam, yet to change one's way of life, as religion in general and Islam in particular require, is difficult for most people.

Revelations from on High

Moreover, it is not easy to digest the idea of revelation from on high, as this experience is far from being common. Yet, those early believers responded to Muhammad's message with acceptance, because they knew him to be truthful: it was very clear to them that a person who never told a lie to people could not fabricate something false and attribute it to God. When they heard the revelations that had been bestowed on Muhammad, they were further convinced of his message, because they realized that everything he said was good. They also looked at the way he was given his revelations, and could see that Muhammad himself had no choice in what revelations were given to him. Similarly, the revelations could come at any moment of the day or night, wherever he was and regardless of whether he was seated, standing, walking or riding. Those nearby could hear some noises near his head, but they could not understand what was said. Muhammad was fully absorbed in the process, which took only a few moments. The process was difficult for him, so as to make him perspire, even when it was very cold, although when it was over, he would be full of energy and he would recite a new passage of the Qur'ān that contained a highly lucid message. His Companions realized that this process was unlike anything that they knew: hence, they were convinced that it must be very special. How could it be otherwise when, in essence, it was a contact with an angel who came from heaven?

Yet, this was not the only way in which the Prophet received revelations. The angel Gabriel sometimes came to the Prophet in the form of a man, and at other times he came in his own angelic form. The result of this process, which continued over a period of twenty-three years, was the Qur'ān: the greatest of miracles. This book that contains God's message to mankind presents a way of life suitable for all generations and all societies. It lays down a set of principles and values that promote every good thing and prohibit only what is detrimental to mankind and human life. The message is expressed in an inimitable style, challenging anyone who doubts that it comes from God to produce even a short passage like it. The Qur'ān combines qualities that cannot be combined in

human expression: concise but fully expressive, making the same address to the general public and to specialized groups, achieving both logical conviction and emotional satisfaction, and achieving clarity with generality. At the time of its revelation, the Arabs were proud of their literary ability, having produced many great poets. However, they were stunned by the beauty of the Qur'ānic style. To this day the Qur'ān has remained the highest standard of literary expression.

The Qur'ān was therefore the best reassurance the Prophet's Companions could have that their belief in Islam and the message preached by Muhammad (peace be upon him). Every time a passage of it was revealed, it gave them added conviction that theirs was the right choice. This remains the case today, as it has been over the last fourteen centuries, and it will continue, God willing, for the rest of time. When a Muslim faces any difficulty, he or she only needs to recite a passage or a *sūrah* of the Qur'ān and it will renew their trust in God's care and their belief that the hardship will be replaced by ease and comfort.

The Prophet's Companions only needed to remember the nature of their life before Islam and the great leap Islam enabled them to achieve in order to enhance their conviction of the truth of their faith. Islam lifted them from the depths, in which they worshipped idols that they made with their own hands, to the heights, where they worshipped God alone, associating no partners with Him. The story of how ʿAmr ibn al-Jamūḥ came to recognize the truth of Islam tells us how much those Companions of the Prophet appreciated the change in their lives produced by Islam.

> Following in the tradition of men of honour in Arabia, ʿAmr had his own personal idol, which was made of wood. He kept the idol in his room, where he glorified and worshipped it. A few young men of his clan, the Salamah, including his own son, decided to employ an innovative method to bring the truth home to him. They made ʿAmr's idol their target. When ʿAmr was fast asleep they would enter his home and take the idol away and throw it into some hole, full of dirt. In the morning, when ʿAmr woke up and discovered the loss of his idol, he would start looking for it. He took the idol out of the hole it was thrown in, cleaned and perfumed it, before putting it back in its place. The same thing happened day after day and ʿAmr was irritated, but he did not know what to do. He apologized to the idol: "Had I known who did this to you, I would certainly punish him severely."
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no idea who abuses you at night. If you are of any use to yourself, then defend yourself against their assault. You have got the sword now." That night, when the young men of Salamah saw the sword with the idol, they took the idol, tied it to a dead dog, and threw it into a disused well where people threw their dirt and litter. In the morning ʿAmr looked for his idol. When he found it after a long search, he was really shaken at the sight. His son and the others who were administering this treatment to the idol spoke to him and pointed out that if the idol could not protect itself, then it could be of no use to anyone. When they outlined the message of Islam to ʿAmr, he accepted it without hesitation. He composed a fine, short poem describing the idol and its uselessness. He also praised God for enabling him to see the truth of Islam.[5]

Events that Gave Reassurance

No one among the Prophet's Companions ever entertained any doubt about the truth of Islam. The Qur'ān was being recited to them by the Prophet, in prayer and at other times, and its powerful message produced its clear effect on their minds and hearts. The change in their life was keenly felt by every one of them. The idea of one of them being chosen as Messenger from God was perfectly acceptable. Nevertheless, God bestowed on them an abundance of His grace to reassure them. The need for such reassurance was clearly stated by the Prophet Abraham when he appealed to God to show him how the dead could be brought back to life:

> When Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead," He replied, "Have you, then, no faith?" "Indeed, I have," said Abraham, "but I only wish to set my heart fully at rest to be fully reassured." God said, "Take four birds and draw them close to you, then [having cut them into pieces] place a part of them on each mountain. Then call them back and they will come to you in haste. Know that God is Almighty, Wise." (2: 260)

Such reassurance came to the people when they most needed it, to show them how God took care of them. There were many situations when they were in desperate need for something to happen and it happened. A little amount of

[5] Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2008, pp. 202-203, based on Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 61.

food and a huge crowd of hungry people: how could they be fed? A little amount of water when so many needed to drink and give their horses and camels to drink: how could it be shared? This all happened by God's grace.

In Chapter 2, I referred to the siege of Madinah by the unbelievers, who raised a large army with the aim of annihilating the Muslim community. The Prophet ordered a dry moat to be dug at the entrance to Madinah to stop the attacking army's advance. The Prophet worked in the digging of the moat as an individual among the community. As they dug, the Muslims chanted in chorus and the Prophet joined in. The Muslims were very poor at the time, and most of them were suffering from hunger. As a result of their hard work, their hunger was especially acute. Many people used the device of putting a stone against their bellies and wrapping it tight to overcome the pangs of hunger. The Prophet himself had two stones wrapped against his belly. As he was working, one of his Companions noticed that he must have been extremely hungry. This man, Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh, was deeply affected by the sight and sought permission to absent himself temporarily. He went straight home to determine what food was there. His wife told him that she had a small quantity of barley and a small goat. He immediately slaughtered the goat and prepared it for cooking. His wife ground the barley and started to cook the goat in a large saucepan.

When the cooking and baking were nearly finished, Jābir went to the Prophet and said: "Messenger of God, I have some food at home. Would you like to be my guest with one or two of your Companions." The Prophet asked him how much food he had, and when he heard Jābir's reply he said: "This is good and plenty. Tell your wife not to take her saucepan off the fire, or her bread out of the oven until I come." Then he addressed his Companions and invited them to Jābir's dinner. All those digging the moat, from among the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār, went with him.

In Jābir's own account of the story, he says that he was exceedingly embarrassed because his little goat and small amount of bread were very inadequate for that large number of people. When he arrived at Jābir's house, the Prophet said to his Companions: "Come inside, but do not push one another." The Prophet himself started to cut the bread, put it in dishes and put meat on top of it. Meanwhile, he kept the pot simmering and covered it as well as the oven, after taking some bread from it. He served dish after dish to his Companions until they had all eaten a full meal. Both the saucepan and the oven were still full of bread and meat when everyone had finished eating. The Prophet then said to Jābir's wife: "Eat of that and send presents to other people, for we have suffered something approaching a famine." She did so, and sent large quantities of bread and meat during the rest of that day.

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There are several reports of this story. Some of these put the figure of those who shared in Jābir's dinner at 800. If everyone who was working on digging the moat accepted the Prophet's invitation to Jābir's house, the number would be even higher. These events are not surprising, not because a little goat – or a large one, for that matter – was enough to feed such a large number of people, but because God blessed that repast and gave the Prophet such a privilege at that particular time.[6]

A similar incident took place during the digging of the moat, which confirms that the Muslims in Madinah were very short of food at the time when the Quraysh resolved to attack them along with other Arab tribes and others from the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍīr.

A daughter of Bashīr ibn Saʿd reported that her mother, ʿAmrah bint Rawāḥah, gave her a small quantity of dates and told her to take them to her father and her uncle, ʿAbdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, for their lunch. On her way, she passed the Prophet who asked her what she was carrying. She replied: "Some dates my mother has sent to my father, Bashīr ibn Saʿd, and my uncle, ʿAbdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, for their lunch." The Prophet said: "Give them to me." She put them in the Prophet's hands and noted that he could have held more. The Prophet ordered a cloth to be spread and then put the dates all over it. He asked someone nearby to invite all the people to lunch. They all came and started eating. The dates increased and increased until everybody had eaten, with the cloth still full of dates.[7]

How could such a small amount of food feed such a large number of people? It is by God's blessing, as He answered the earnest supplication by His Messenger.

Furthermore, ʿImrān ibn Ḥuṣayn reported that during an expedition with the Prophet, they travelled throughout much of the night. After giving some details about missing the *Fajr* (dawn) prayers, he went on to say:

> The Prophet then travelled on, but people complained of thirst. He stopped and instructed ʿAlī and another person to go around in search of water. They met a woman riding a camel on top of two large leather water containers. They asked her where they could find water. She said: "The last I saw any water spring was this time yesterday. Our people went in search of more water." They said: "Come with us, then." She asked: "Where to?" They said: "To God's Messenger." She said: "Is he the one

[6] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See also, Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 233.
[7] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 3, p. 233.

> who is called Ṣābi' [i.e. the one who deserted his religion]?" They said: "He is the one you mean. Come along." They brought her to the Prophet and told him what conversation they had with her. They asked her to dismount. The Prophet then asked for a bucket and poured into it some water from the top openings of the two leather containers before tying up the top openings. He untied the bottom opening. An announcement was made for people to come to drink and fill up. Whoever wanted a drink had it and whoever needed to fill up his container did so. The last was that the Prophet gave a bucket full of water to a man who had told him that he was in the state of ceremonial impurity. The Prophet said to him: "Wash yourself with this water." The woman remained standing, looking on what was being done with her water. By God, when it was over we all thought that the two leather containers were even fuller than when he started.
>
> The Prophet then said: "Make a collection for her." They brought something of what they had: some dates, bread, cookies, etc. They put that food in a robe, helped her back on her camel and put the robe with the food on her lap. The Prophet said to her: "You know, we have taken nothing of your water. It is God that has given us this water to drink." She went back to her people, having been long delayed. They asked her: "What has delayed you?" She said: "Something very strange. I met two men who took me to the man people call Ṣābi' [and she reported what happened]. By God, he is the greatest magician between this and this [pointing to the sky and the earth], or he is indeed God's Messenger." Muslims later raided the unbelievers in her area, but avoided her people's quarters. One day she said to her people: "I think these people are deliberately steering away from us. I suggest that we should become Muslims." They agreed with her and embraced Islam (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The events in this case were similar, in some ways, to an event at Umm Maʿbad's place. Umm Maʿbad was a Bedouin woman who camped somewhere on the Prophet's route as he travelled. When he was immigrating from Makkah to Madinah, he had taken an unfamiliar route in order to escape his pursuers. She had no milk or food to offer, as her husband had taken their sheep to graze, leaving only one sheep that was too weak to join the rest. Times were very hard in that part of the desert. As there were very few places where animals could graze, few sheep produced any milk. Umm Maʿbad expressed her deep regret that she had practically nothing to offer her guests. However, having sought and

There are several reports of this story. Some of these put the figure of those who shared in Jābir's dinner at 800. If everyone who was working on digging the moat accepted the Prophet's invitation to Jābir's house, the number would be even higher. These events are not surprising, not because a little goat – or a large one, for that matter – was enough to feed such a large number of people, but because God blessed that repast and gave the Prophet such a privilege at that particular time.[6]

A similar incident took place during the digging of the moat, which confirms that the Muslims in Madinah were very short of food at the time when the Quraysh resolved to attack them along with other Arab tribes and others from the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍīr.

A daughter of Bashīr ibn Saʿd reported that her mother, ʿAmrah bint Rawāḥah, gave her a small quantity of dates and told her to take them to her father and her uncle, ʿAbdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, for their lunch. On her way, she passed the Prophet who asked her what she was carrying. She replied: "Some dates my mother has sent to my father, Bashīr ibn Saʿd, and my uncle, ʿAbdullāh ibn Rawāḥah, for their lunch." The Prophet said: "Give them to me." She put them in the Prophet's hands and noted that he could have held more. The Prophet ordered a cloth to be spread and then put the dates all over it. He asked someone nearby to invite all the people to lunch. They all came and started eating. The dates increased and increased until everybody had eaten, with the cloth still full of dates.[7]

How could such a small amount of food feed such a large number of people? It is by God's blessing, as He answered the earnest supplication by His Messenger.

Furthermore, ʿImrān ibn Ḥuṣayn reported that during an expedition with the Prophet, they travelled throughout much of the night. After giving some details about missing the *Fajr* (dawn) prayers, he went on to say:

> The Prophet then travelled on, but people complained of thirst. He stopped and instructed ʿAlī and another person to go around in search of water. They met a woman riding a camel on top of two large leather water containers. They asked her where they could find water. She said: "The last I saw any water spring was this time yesterday. Our people went in search of more water." They said: "Come with us, then." She asked: "Where to?" They said: "To God's Messenger." She said: "Is he the one

[6] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See also, Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 233.
[7] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 3, p. 233.

> who is called Ṣābi' [i.e. the one who deserted his religion]?" They said: "He is the one you mean. Come along." They brought her to the Prophet and told him what conversation they had with her. They asked her to dismount. The Prophet then asked for a bucket and poured into it some water from the top openings of the two leather containers before tying up the top openings. He untied the bottom opening. An announcement was made for people to come to drink and fill up. Whoever wanted a drink had it and whoever needed to fill up his container did so. The last was that the Prophet gave a bucket full of water to a man who had told him that he was in the state of ceremonial impurity. The Prophet said to him: "Wash yourself with this water." The woman remained standing, looking on what was being done with her water. By God, when it was over we all thought that the two leather containers were even fuller than when he started.
>
> The Prophet then said: "Make a collection for her." They brought something of what they had: some dates, bread, cookies, etc. They put that food in a robe, helped her back on her camel and put the robe with the food on her lap. The Prophet said to her: "You know, we have taken nothing of your water. It is God that has given us this water to drink." She went back to her people, having been long delayed. They asked her: "What has delayed you?" She said: "Something very strange. I met two men who took me to the man people call Ṣābi' [and she reported what happened]. By God, he is the greatest magician between this and this [pointing to the sky and the earth], or he is indeed God's Messenger." Muslims later raided the unbelievers in her area, but avoided her people's quarters. One day she said to her people: "I think these people are deliberately steering away from us. I suggest that we should become Muslims." They agreed with her and embraced Islam (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

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received his hostess's consent, the Prophet wiped the dry breasts of the sheep and mentioned God's name. Milk came gushing out in abundance. Everyone in the Prophet's group drank his fill and Umm Ma'bad was left with a large quantity of milk before the travellers continued their journey.[8]

A different type of problem faced Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh when his father died. He left an outstanding debt of thirty sacks of dates owing to a Jew:

> Jābir sought agreement to reschedule this debt but the man did not agree. Jābir then went to the Prophet seeking his support in persuading the creditor to give him more time. The Prophet met the Jew and requested him to take Jābir's harvest of dates in full repayment of his debt, but the man refused. The Prophet then went to Jabir's garden and walked throughout it. He then said to Jābir: "Pick up your dates and repay him in full." The Prophet then left and Jābir started harvesting his dates. He gave the Jew his thirty sacks and had seventeen more sacks for his family. Jābir went to see the Prophet after that and to tell him. The Prophet was offering *'Aṣr* prayer. When he finished, Jabir told him what happened. The Prophet said: "Tell this to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb." He went and told 'Umar who said: "I realized that you would have God's blessings when I saw God's Messenger walking in your garden." (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

Blessings or Miracles

All these stories have in common an element of an incredible increase of resources in situations where people of the Muslim community were facing real hardship. People sought the Prophet's help, or else the Prophet himself realized the problem and took action, as in the case of the two incidents during the digging of the moat. There are many other stories like these that took place at one time or another. In all thse examples, the common factor was that the Prophet would handle the situation himself and say a supplication that was not heard by those around him: witnesses only mention that they saw him saying a prayer or a supplication. When necessary, he would take over the action, as in the case of serving the food given by Jābir, or putting his hand in the water as in some other incidents. Were these miracles? From our human perspective, they were no doubt supernatural happenings. However, they were not offered by the

[8] Al-Ḥākim al-Naysabūrī, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 9.

Prophet or anyone else as signs or proofs that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was God's Messenger. No one was asked to believe in Islam as a result of any such event. These events reassured the Prophet's Companions and gave them certainty that they were following the right path; but they were not presented as evidence of the truth of Islam. Rather, they showed two things. Firstly, they show that when God's blessings are given, a small amount of food suffices an army, and a container of water can become like a spring. It was God's blessing of Jābir's goat and the girl's dates that gave hundreds of people two meals during their hard work in digging the moat to defend Islam. Secondly, they show that when God answers a prayer, there is no limit to how much He gives.

This last point is best illustrated by the following *ḥadīth* in which Anas ibn Mālik reports:

> People endured a period of hardship during the Prophet's lifetime. One Friday as the Prophet was delivering his sermon a Bedouin stood up and said: "Messenger of God, the people are ruined and the children are hungry. Pray to God to give us rain." The Prophet lifted his arms and said a prayer. There was not a single cloud in the sky. Within a few minutes mountains of clouds gathered. The Prophet hardly came down and I could see the rain wetting his beard. The rain continued for the rest of the day, the following day and the one after up to the following Friday. The same Bedouin or perhaps someone else stood up and said: "Messenger of God, buildings have collapsed and property drowned. Pray for us." The Prophet lifted his arms and prayed: "Our Lord, make it around us, not over us." He pointed with his hand to the sky. Wherever he pointed, the sky reappeared. Madinah became like an open area at the centre of a huge circle. The Qanāt Wādī, or watercourse, continued to be running for a month. Whoever came from the surrounding areas spoke of the plentiful rain. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

When we study these reports and others like them we need to remember that the Prophet did not claim credit for them: they were God's work. Moreover, he did not have any special privilege as a result. He shared in them like one of the people. He had a meal with them, or drank and performed his ablution, as they all did. Sometimes, he did not take anything for himself (as in the case of Jābir's garden), and he only appealed to God to grant the people His blessings. These events showed God's power to accomplish whatever He wills, and reminded all people of the great truth about God: "When He intends something to be, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is." (36: 82)

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Notably, all these cases were to ease the hardship of other people: either an individual, a group or a large section of the Muslim community. The Prophet never requested these for himself, despite his poverty. Ibn ʿAbbās, the Prophet's cousin, reports: "God's Messenger might go several nights without dinner for himself or his family. Their bread was mostly barley bread." (Related by Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mājah.) Likewise, ʿĀ'ishah reports: "People of Muhammad's household never had enough barley bread to feed them on two days in succession until he passed away." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) Some people may wonder: if a few dates could feed a large group of people when the Prophet prayed God to bless their food, why he did not do the same when his family did not have much to eat? The answer is that he did not seek anything for himself or his family, as whatever God gave he believed to be sufficient for him. He trusted to God and God gave him enough for them to live on. This is best described in this authentic *ḥadīth*. ʿĀ'ishah said:

> "We might look at a new moon, then another new moon, then another: three new moons in two months, without a fire being lit for cooking in any of the Prophet's homes." ʿUrwah, her nephew, asked her: "What sustained you, then, aunt?" She said: "The two black ones: dates and water. The Prophet, however, had some Anṣārī neighbours who had milk producing cattle and they used to send milk to the Prophet and he would give us to drink." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

CHAPTER 7

MUHAMMAD: GOD'S SERVANT

IN ORDER TO be a Muslim, a person must first make the following declaration: "I bear witness that there is no deity other than God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is God's Messenger." The word *islām* means "submission or self surrender", and a *muslim* is one who submits oneself to God. When consciously made, this declaration indicates submission to God and a commitment to obey God in all situations. Such obedience is achieved by following and implementing the teachings of the Prophet, as he was the one who delivered God's message to us.

A popular variant of the above declaration, particularly in prayer, amends the second part of the phrase to state: "I bear witness that Muhammad is God's servant and Messenger." It is important to consider what this addition means, remembering that all creatures, human and non-human, are God's servants.

The Arabic term for servant is *ʿabd*, which also means "slave" or "worshipper." Hence, *ʿabd* is often used as part of a person's name, and this is followed by one of the names or attributes of God. Thus, we have names like ʿAbd al-Hādī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, or ʿAbd al-Ghafūr: these mean, respectively, "Servant of the One who provides guidance", "the Lord of Grace", and "the Forgiver." Some people use the word "slave" for *ʿabd*. However, this is incorrect, because the connotations of slavery are entirely different from those of the bond between God and man. This bond is established by submission to God and commitment to do His bidding in every respect.

God, however, does not charge anyone with anything that is too difficult for them. On the contrary, He is compassionate to them, ready always to forgive them their sins and overlook their slips. He provides them with guidance so that they will choose the course that brings them happiness in this present life and in the life to come. Thus, the relationship between man and God is one of

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care and mutual love. Man chooses to submit himself to God, realizing that by such submission he becomes in harmony with the universe around him, as the universe, along with all the creatures that live in it, submit to God. Only man is given the freedom of choice, allowing him to disobey God and to move against the laws of nature that God set in operation. Therefore, when man submits to God, he is making a genuine effort, declaring that by free will he is choosing to follow God's guidance. God will then respond by bestowing His mercy and by giving His worshippers a rich reward: He will admit them to heaven in the life to come. In heaven, each person will have a life of uninterrupted bliss.

This special relationship between man and God gives man a sense of pride in his position. He will no longer be willing to submit to any authority that requires him to disobey God. Rather, he wants to implement God's laws and follow His guidance, knowing that this will bring about harmony between him and the world around him. He judges that turning away from God's message puts him in conflict with the world around him and with his human nature. Such conflict brings man misery in this world and puts him in the wrong position in the life to come. However, pride in having such a relationship with God does not lead believers to become conceited; instead, it brings about modesty in their dealings with all people. As God has favoured man with His guidance, therefore, a good believer is grateful to God and this gratitude is expressed through unfailing modesty. Only when God's authority is challenged does a believer stand up, to assert his pride in his faith. In such a situation, a believer revels in submission to God alone, and will not yield to anyone but God.

To be a servant of God, a person is required to resist temptation. People are often exposed to temptation: material or otherwise. When a person stands to gain something of great appeal to human nature, resisting the temptation may prove very difficult, particularly when no adverse effects are imminent. In many societies, some things that are prohibited by religion are permissible according to the law of the land, and people might be tempted to violate the religious prohibition. When the element of no immediate liability is added, this temptation may become even stronger. Only a sense of pride in being a servant of God can help a person to overcome temptation and steer a clear path that maintains obedience to the Divine law. We must remember that Divine law requires only what is good for man and that which ensures our happiness in both this life and the next.

When people view themselves as servants of God and submit to Him, they should be aware that no one acquires a special status. The only status is that which God bestows as an act of grace, as was given to Prophets and Messengers of God. Apart from these, no one obtains a status that distinguishes him or

her from the rest of mankind. A person may be very devout and God may be pleased with them, but they will not know this until the Day of Judgement; although God may bestow on them His grace in this life, by facilitating that which appears difficult, smoothing their way, or giving them strength to overcome their weaknesses. God's servants will feel His hand in all this, but will not assume that they have earned it or that it is due to them by right; rather, they will always understand that it was granted as an act of grace by God. Therefore, they will be more devout and their submission to God will become clearer and more complete.

All this applied to the Prophet, as he was "God's servant and Messenger." As God's servant, he readily and fully submitted himself to God, accepting His will, regardless of what it might bring him. Hence, he aspired to no particular status. Prior to his first meeting with the angel Gabriel, he had no idea of the proper relation between man and God, as there was nothing left of the heritage of the Prophets Abraham and Ishmael, aside from a vague belief in God and a few distorted rituals. Hence, he could have no inclination of what way to follow. Some Arabs, particularly in Madinah, who were in contact with Christians or Jews, were told that the scriptures of both religions foretold of the final Messenger who would bring Divine faith to its fullness. The Arabs of Makkah, however, had no such information. When they were later told that Muhammad was a Prophet, some of them asked: "what is a Prophet?" God states in the Qur'ān: "You could never hope that this Book would be conferred on you. But it came by your Lord's grace." (28: 86) The Prophet recognized the exceptional grace God had bestowed on him and dedicated himself to the task assigned to him. Throughout the twenty-three years of his mission he never lost sight of his primary position as God's servant. He showed by example that to be God's servant was an honourable position for every human being. When circumstances were difficult and required an enormous sacrifice, he would say: "I am God's servant, and I will never disobey Him."

The Prophet's recognition of his position as God's servant gave him a sense of peace and tranquillity, even in the most critical and dangerous situations. This was possible because he fully understood the promise that God has given to all believers:

> For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect. God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose. God has set a measure for everything. (65: 2-3)

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> For everyone who fears God, He will grant a way out, and will provide for him whence he does not expect. God will be sufficient for everyone who puts his trust in Him. God always attains His purpose. God has set a measure for everything. (65: 2-3)

The Prophet was God-fearing and he placed his trust fully in God: therefore, he feared no one and dreaded no situation. On the contrary, when things were at their hardest, he was very calm, trusting that whatever happened would be good because it was God's choice. An example can be seen from the time when he had to flee Makkah, as the plot to assassinate him was in full swing. He travelled in the opposite direction to where he was heading in order to confuse his pursuers. He and his only Companion, Abū Bakr, then took refuge in a cave. Their pursuers passed outside the cave, and Abū Bakr said to him: "Any one of them needs only to look where he is stepping and he will see us." Yet his trust in God never failed him. He answered: "Abū Bakr, what do you think of two people when God is with them?" (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

Those in chase could have easily seen them, and if they did, there would be just one result, as the previous day the Quraysh unanimously agreed to kill him and had put a huge price on his head. At that very critical moment the Prophet only acknowledged that God was with him, and was without even a quiver of anxiety. He did all he could to evade them and he placed his trust in God.

Total Trust in God

The Prophet worked hard to instil this complete trust in God in his followers. He believed that as God's servants, Muslims must place all their trust in God, regardless of what may happen to them. Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt was a Muslim whose lowly status in Makkah placed him in a most vulnerable position. He suffered immense torture. He reports:

> We complained to God's Messenger as he was reclining on a sheet close to the Kaʿbah. We said: "Will you not pray to God to help us? Will you not pray for us?" He said: "In days before your time, a believer might be taken away and a hole in the ground would be dug and he would be placed in it. A saw would be placed over his head and then he would be cut in half. Or else, he would be tortured with combs of iron tearing his flesh and baring his bones. None of this would make him turn away from his faith. By God, He will bring this matter of ours to full victory so that a single traveller would go from Sanaa to Hadramout, fearing no one other than God, and that a wolf may kill his sheep. You only precipitate matters." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī and others.)

We know from the wealth of accounts that speak about the Prophet and his character that he felt for everyone of his Companions. Whenever

they encountered a difficulty, he shared their feelings. When they suffered persecution, his pain was not less than theirs. This *ḥadīth*, however, tells us that a few of those who suffered most at the hands of the Quraysh, who resorted to all methods of torture, complained to the Prophet about what they had to endure and requested him to pray for them. He met their request very calmly and told them that there was nothing unusual about what they had to endure. The forces of evil will always try to suppress the voice of the truth. He wanted them to place their trust in God and be reassured that Islam would triumph.

We err, however, if we think that by placing our trust in God we will be spared all adversity, physical or otherwise. The Prophet suggested that Khabbāb and those who were complaining should endure the torture and persecution while placing their trust in God. He confirmed that although the ultimate result would be the triumph of the truth of the Divine faith, endurance of hardship and perseverance in adversity were always necessary.

Just before the first major battle between the Muslims and the idolater Arabs of the Quraysh in Badr, the Prophet prayed hard to God to grant him victory. In his prayer, he said: "My Lord, if you allow this band of believers to perish today, there will remain none to worship You."[1] To him, a defeat that would rout out the believers was a possibility that he hoped to avert. Hence, his eager appeals to God to fulfil His promise of victory. He was entirely unaware of God's design. He never claimed to know anything other than the truths that God decided to tell him at any particular time. At the time of digging the dry moat to defend Madinah against the attacking armies, he helped in breaking a hard rock. He said to his Companions that he could see the palaces of Syria and Persia and the gates of Sanaa each time sparks went out when he hit the rock, he did not know when, or how these countries would join the fold of Islam. He told his Companions all he knew. As it happened, all these areas became parts of the Muslim state within two decades and many of those who heard his words at the time shared in the fulfilment of that prophecy.

The requirements of submission to, and reliance on God, do not mean that a Muslim leaves everything up to God to take care of. On the contrary, reliance on God requires that a Muslim should take every measure possible in order to face any situation. When this has been done, the servant of God then trusts God to bring about the best outcome. This was clear in the Prophet's behaviour throughout his life, and this is an example that we must follow.

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[1] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, p. 267. See also, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Book of *Tafsīr*), *Sūrah* 54.

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Most Devout Worshipper

Intertwined with reliance on God and placing one's trust in Him is the aspect of worship, which is an equally important connotation of the term *'abd* which means "servant of God." Perhaps humanity has not seen, and will not see, a person who is a more devoted worshipper than Muhammad (peace be upon him). We need only to be familiar with his behaviour and teachings to realize this. In fact, worship was to him like the air he breathed. Here I can only give a glimpse of his worship, although I maintain that a proper study will always confirm this statement.

> Islamic worship has different aspects and forms: prayer is both physical and verbal, *zakāt* is financial, fasting is an act of worship by abstention and the pilgrimage combines all four aspects. Of these, prayer is the most important form of Islamic worship. The Prophet says: "A religion that does not include prayer is useless." The Arabic term for prayer is *ṣalāh*, which is derived from a root that signifies "contact, link, or bond." In fact, Islamic prayer provides all this and establishes a bond between the believer and God. In order to give Muhammad the strength necessary to fulfil his role as His Messenger, God commanded him in the early stage of his mission to spend a large portion of the night, every night, in worship: "Stand in prayer at night, all but a small part of it, half of it, or a little less, or add to it. Recite the Qur'ān calmly and distinctly. We shall bestow on you a weighty message." (73: 2-5)

For a whole year, the Prophet, and the few people who responded to his call and believed in Islam, offered their nightly worship, by praying and reciting the Qur'ān. Scholars maintain that the closest position to God that any person can achieve is to stand up in prayer, reciting the Qur'ān, which is God's own word, and reflecting on its meaning. Later, this requirement was relaxed. Night worship remained an important part of the moulding of a Muslim's character, but it became voluntary; one can spend only a few minutes in such worship, or may choose to do it for longer. The importance of this activity is the understanding it gives of the relation between man and God.

An important part of Islamic worship is the glorification of God, by praising Him and expressing our gratitude to Him for all the blessings He gives us. This also adds to our proper understanding of our position in the universe and gives us the correct concept of God. This understanding is derived from what the Prophet has taught us by word and example:

Just before Islam there were people who had no idea of God, but Muhammad gave them inner light and led them to a clear knowledge of their Lord. There were others who had wrong ideas of God, imagining that He had a son or partners who acted as intermediaries, but Muhammad presented mankind with the clearest idea of God's absolute Oneness, showing clearly that God has no son, daughter, partner, counterpart or equal of any sort: "Have they chosen protectors other than Him? God alone is the Protector of all; He is the One who gives life to the dead; and He has power over all things. Whatever the subject of your disputes, the final word belongs to God. Such is God, my Lord. In Him have I placed my trust, and to Him do I always turn. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. He made mates for you from among yourselves, just as He made mates for animals, so that you will multiply. Nothing bears even the slightest comparability to Him. He alone hears all and sees all. His are the keys of the heavens and the earth. He gives abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure to whomever He wills. He has full knowledge of everything." (42: 9-12)

> Muhammad's knowledge of God is perfect, unequalled by anyone who has ever lived or will ever live, because it is based on a vision that could never fade. A Muslim who follows the Prophet's example realizes that his knowledge of God has special characteristics that are clearly reflected in his discourse. It is clear, true, warm, penetrative, free of ambiguity and affectation. Human discourse must have a certain degree of warmth in order to achieve its desired effect. When Muhammad speaks of God, whether in hope or fear, the very words have a strong impulse, flowing emotion and high warmth. Whether you read his words or listen to them, your heart will be properly affected and you will feel the greatness of God, the Lord of all worlds.[2]

Imagine what the earth contains along a straight line that goes from one point on its surface until it reappears at the opposite end. There must be a multitude of things of which we still have no knowledge. God reminds us: "You, [mankind], have been granted but little knowledge." (17: 85) God gives us a picture of His knowledge to reflect upon:

[2] Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fann al-Dhikr wa'l-Du'ā' 'Inda Khātam al-Anbiyā'* (The Art of God's Glorification and Supplication by the Last Prophet), Cairo, 1998, pp. 10-11.

> [He is] the Lord of Grace, established on the throne of His almightiness. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth, as well as all that is between them, and underneath the soil. If you say anything aloud, then [know that] He knows all that is secret, as well as all that is yet more hidden. [He is] God; there is no deity other than Him. His alone are all the attributes of perfection. (20: 5-8)

A secret known to only one person who closely guards it may be considered unknown to others. God tells us that He knows every such secret and even that which is more hidden. Even the tiniest particle in the depth of the earth is known well to God Almighty. Perhaps this is how far our imagination can go, but in this universe there are worlds that we know nothing about. Yet everything in those worlds and beyond them is known to God. Nothing is hidden from Him.

Having this vision of God, the Prophet addressed God in his prayer with words that we can do well to memorize and often repeat. According to 'Ali's description of the Prophet's prayer:

> When he bowed, he said: "My Lord, I bow to You, believe in You and submit to You. My hearing, eyesight, brain, bones and nerves all bow before You." When he lifted his head, he said: "May God listen to whoever praises Him. My Lord, praise is due to You, as much as would fill up the heavens, the earth, all in between and whatever You may wish beyond these." Then when he prostrated himself in *sujūd* he said: "My Lord, to You I prostrate myself; in You I believe; and to You I submit myself. My face is in prostration before the One who created and fashioned it, and gave it its hearing and eyesight. All glory belongs to God, the best of all creators."[3]

Such an address to God embodies the meaning of perfect Godhead and perfect submission to Him:

> Within the Qur'ānic narratives, legislation, images of the universe, and description of the resurrection on the Day of Judgement, we read hundreds of references to God's noble attributes. The Qur'ān does not accept that God's praises should be presented in a theoretical way that leaves the heart untouched or has no bearing on man's behaviour. The Prophet, the most devoted worshipper of God, translated this approach

[3] Muhammad al-Ghazali, ibid., p. 11.

into practice in all aspects of his life. Thus, he became a man of God, with his heart and mind looking up to God, approaching everything in life in God's name, as though he was looking at God and hearing Him. A person who is satisfied with God does not yield to feelings of fear or desire; and the one who derives strength from God is not worried by the numerical strength of the enemy; and the one who watches God before taking any action adopts the same approach in public and private; and those who seek success in the life to come are not swerved off their way by the goals of this present life.

Muhammad's heart was always alive with consciousness of his Lord. He had a profound sense of God's greatness; and this was the solid foundation of his relations with other people and with the Creator. Listen to him as he addressed this supplication to God: "My Lord, I appeal to you by the fact that You know all that is beyond human perception, and by Your Almightiness, to keep me alive as long as You know that life is better for me and to cause me to die when You know that death is better for me. My Lord, I appeal to You to make me God-fearing in all situations. Help me to say the truth when I am pleased or angry. Grant me moderation in poverty and affluence. I request You to grant me unending joy and comfort, and unceasing satisfaction. Grant me contentedness with whatever You give me and resurrection after death. I appeal to You to grant me the happiness to look at Your face and to yearn to meeting You in a life that is free of painful harm and confusing strife. Grant us, our Lord, the splendour generated by faith, and make us guides following the right path."[4]

When we study the Prophet's life, we find him glorifying God and praising Him at every moment of his life. He would wake up before dawn, leaving his bed when the dark curtain of the night still covers everything. He then says: "Praise be to God who has returned my spirit to me, given me physical strength and permitted me to glorify Him." Consider how he welcomes life, full of optimism: "Praise be to God who has returned my spirit to me." Life is a gift from God and we are able to do many good things in a day. The Prophet expresses his gratitude for his well-being.

We may reflect long on the last part of this supplication, which mentions God's permission to glorify Him. That is an expression of complete devotion that words can hardly describe:

[4] Muhammad al-Ghazali, ibid., p. 12.

> [He is] the Lord of Grace, established on the throne of His almightiness. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth, as well as all that is between them, and underneath the soil. If you say anything aloud, then [know that] He knows all that is secret, as well as all that is yet more hidden. [He is] God; there is no deity other than Him. His alone are all the attributes of perfection. (20: 5-8)

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Muhammad, God's ever grateful servant, begins his praises using words that impart certitude of faith and pure love in every letter and sound. He says these words morning and evening: "My Lord, I pray You to grant me sound health in this life and in the life to come, to forgive me and to give me purity in faith, life, family and property. My Lord, grant me a cover of my flaws and reassurance in time of fear. Protect me from what lies ahead of me, behind me, to my right, to my left and above me. I appeal to Your greatness to protect me from any danger that lies beneath me."

The Prophet urged every Muslim to say as he begins or ends his day: "My Lord, You know all that is beyond human perception and all that is witnessed by anyone; You are the Originator of the heavens and the earth; You are the Lord and owner of all. I bear witness that there is no deity other than You. I seek refuge with You from the evil that is within me and from the machinations of Satan."[5]

This is just a glimpse of how often the Prophet glorified God and praised Him in every day of his life. His awareness of God's presence never left him for a moment, and He praised Him at every juncture and before every action. The Prophet is therefore the perfect role model for all believers. Some of us may wonder whether we have to repeat all these supplications all the time. Scholars rightly make clear that although they are all recommended, none is obligatory. However, the late Shaikh Muhammad al-Ghazali says of this:

> I feel that it is necessary to reflect at length on such glorifications and passionate supplications when one's heart is slackening and the relation with God weakens. They are highly effective in giving us the right concept of God and making us aware of the significance of His great attributes. Faith becomes ineffective when it is not based on enlightened vision. When conviction is only marginal, it cannot control behaviour or keep wanton desire in check. Indeed, the Prophet's Companions were able to attain the summit of faith and change the course of history, replacing constitutions and morality with what were infinitely better ones, only because they were close to the Prophet, watching his life and guided by his light. They thus allowed his exemplary sincerity and love of God to fill their hearts as they filled his. Such is human nature. To my mind, listening to the Prophet as he addressed his supplication, and feeling his

[5] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

> emotion as he appealed to God are bound to enlighten our hearts and minds, motivating us to draw closer to God.[6]

Similarly, when we consider how the Prophet glorified God at every juncture and praised Him for whatever happened, it is natural to be concerned that no matter how hard we try, we will fall short of what is required. People who think in this way may then drive themselves too hard. However, the Prophet was keen to show that he did not despise comforts and luxuries. He wanted people to enjoy life, while also remembering their relation with God. ʿĀ'ishah reports that when the Prophet told people to do something, he only specified actions that were within their ability. When they said to the Prophet:

> "We are unlike you, Messenger of God. How can we be, when God has forgiven you all your sins, past and future?" He was angry, and anger was clear in his face. He said to them: "I am the one who is most God-fearing and the one who best knows what God wishes." (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr was a devout young Companion of the Prophet. He reports that the Prophet met him and said: "'ʿAbdullāh, I am told that you fast every day and spend long hours in night worship." ʿAbdullāh confirmed that he did that. The Prophet said:

> Do not do that. Fast on some days and do not fast on others. Spend time in night worship on some nights, and have a good sleep. Your body has a rightful claim on you; your eyes have a rightful claim on you; your wife has a rightful claim on you; and your visitor has a rightful claim on you. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Taking the Prophet's guidance in total will enable us to steer a middle way, in which we observe and pursue whatever is duty, add some of what is voluntary, attend to our work and meet the needs of our families.

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[6] Muhammad al-Ghazali, ibid., p. 19.

CHAPTER 8

A MAN TO DELIVER GOD'S MESSAGE

THE PROPHET WAS repeatedly instructed, in the Qur'ān, to stress his human status. One verse says:

> Say: I am but a human being like yourselves. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One and only God. Therefore, take the straight path to Him and seek His forgiveness. Woe to those who associate partners with Him. (41: 6)

Two points are stressed here, as elsewhere in the Qur'ān: firstly, that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is an ordinary human being like everyone else; and secondly, that he receives revelations from on high concerning the sort of religion that people will do well to embrace. In fact, the Prophet received revelations over a period of twenty-three years. When those revelations were completed, the religion of Islam was complete. God states in the last Qur'ānic revelation: "This day I have perfected your religion for you and have bestowed on you the full measure of My blessings and have chosen Islam as a religion for you." (5: 3)

The Prophet had no control over the timing of any revelation of the Qur'ān or of its content, as God determined when and what to reveal to His Messenger. The fact that the Qur'ān was revealed over such a long period served several purposes, one of which was that certain rules were only revealed when the Muslim community felt the need for them.

For example, the opening verses of *Sūrah* 24 ("The Light") specify the punishment for adultery. They include a punishment for making an accusation of adultery without producing the necessary evidence to prove it: "As for those

> who accuse chaste women [of adultery], and cannot produce four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes; and do not accept their testimony ever after; for they are indeed transgressors." (24: 4) When the Prophet read this out to his Companions, one of them, Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah, wondered how this would work if a man found his wife in bed with another man. The Prophet responded that these were God's revelations. However, Sa'd still felt that further clarification was needed.
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> A short while later, a man came forward and accused his wife of adultery. The Prophet required him to bring his witnesses. The man protested that as this was done at home he had no witnesses. The Prophet said that he had no option but to require the stated evidence, or else he would punish the accuser in accordance with the above verse. The man said: "By God, I shall not be punished for telling the truth." As this debate went on, the Prophet received the verses that come next in the *sūrah* and state:

> And as for those who accuse their own wives [of adultery], but have no witnesses except themselves, let each of them call God four times to witness that he is indeed telling the truth; and the fifth time, that God's curse be upon him if he is telling a lie. However, punishment is averted from her if she calls God four times to witness that he is indeed telling a lie; and the fifth time, that God's wrath be upon her if he is telling the truth. Were it not for God's favour upon you and His grace, and that God is the One who accepts repentance, the Wise…! (24: 6-10)

That this ruling was revealed only when the case was placed before the Prophet showed the Muslim community that God was taking care of them and providing for their welfare. This was a great feeling for those who lived that experience, and it was unique in the history of mankind. Moreover, it provided further evidence confirming that the Prophet only gave the community what was bestowed on him. He had no say in what to be revealed or when it should be revealed.

Sometimes this affected him personally, as in the case of what is known as *ifk*, "the Falsehood Story." This refers to a rumour, spread by some hypocrites, that 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, consorted with a man called Ṣafwān. The rumour circulated in Madinah for a month, during which 'Ā'ishah was ill and could not be questioned. No evidence was produced by anyone, but people talked. The Prophet did not receive any revelations concerning the matter, and so he could not act in any way. He neither punished those who spread the rumours, nor

CHAPTER 8

A MAN TO DELIVER GOD'S MESSAGE

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remonstrated with his wife. The most he did was to ask some of his Companions for advice. Only when the Qur'ān was revealed, declaring ʿĀ'ishah's innocence, did the Prophet take proper action.

What does this repeated reference to Muhammad's human status signify? People often heap much praise on their heroes and historical figures. Some Prophets have been given Divine status: for instance, many claimed that Jesus was the son of God. In the case of Muhammad, nothing of the sort can be claimed. There were certainly people who praised him in exaggerated terms. Some Sufis claimed that without him God would not have created the universe. Needless to say, this is absurd. However, even those who made such unacceptable claims acknowledged that he was human. No Muslim – from any school of thought – departs from this.

From a different point of view, Muhammad's human status meant that everything God required of people applied to him. He was required to worship God only, throughout his life, and to omit nothing of the acts of worship that Islam required. God tells him in the Qur'ān: "Worship your Lord till the certainty [of death] comes to you." (15: 99) The Prophet was a model worshipper. He devoted himself to worship at all hours of day and night. All other Islamic duties, such as *zakāt*, fasting and the pilgrimage, applied to him. He observed the fast every Ramadan without fail. He paid his *zakāt* and performed the pilgrimage. He offered much more of all the various aspects of Islamic worship than what was required. He only performed the pilgrimage once, as is required of all Muslims, but this was due to the fact that for several years he could not perform the pilgrimage because the unbelievers were the rulers in Makkah. After Makkah was under his control, he did not live long enough to be able to offer it more than once.

As a human being, a Prophet and a Messenger of God, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was also told: "Therefore, remain patient in adversity, for God's promise always comes true. Ask forgiveness for your sins, and extol your Lord's glory and praise evening and morning." (40: 55) The point in question here is: could the Prophet have committed sins so as to need to pray for forgiveness? For certain, the Prophet never contemplated doing anything that God had forbidden. To go against God's wishes constitutes a sin. This means that the Prophet never deliberately intended to disobey God in any way. However, some thoughts might have occurred to him at one point or another, as a result of certain circumstances. In his case, such little matters might have constituted a slip and he was instructed to seek God's forgiveness for them. This verse tells us that if the Prophet is required to pray for God's forgiveness, we all need to do the same, but in greater measure.

As noted in Chapter 6, the Prophet spent much time in worship. He could spend long hours of night in prayer and supplication. However, he always made things easy for his Companions and followers. He was keen not to give them tasks that they would find too arduous.

Why then was he so keen to spend so much time in devotion? The answer to this was provided by ʿĀ'ishah, his wife, when she put the same question to the Prophet, pointing out that God had already forgiven him every possible sin that he might have committed or may commit. The Prophet responded: "Should I not then be a servant of God who gives thanks to Him?" His extra effort was to express his gratitude to the Almighty for all the favours that He had granted him. At the same time, the Prophet wanted to ensure that his Companions and his followers in future generations would not overtax themselves in trying to be devout, and so he would often point out concessions. He made sure that people would act upon these. He tells us: "God loves that the concessions He grants are exercised in the same way as the tasks that require hard effort be attended to."

People, however, tend to make things harder for themselves. They often belittle their good actions and think that they need to do more. ʿĀ'ishah reports:

> The Prophet did something, pointing out that it was a concession given to people. Some, however, refrained from doing it. This was reported to the Prophet. He addressed the people, starting by praising God. He said: "What is the matter with some people? They refrain from doing what I do. By God, I am the one who knows God best and the one who is most God-fearing." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Putting things into the proper perspective, the Prophet makes it clear that even the most strenuous effort in worship and good deeds will not be sufficient for anyone to ensure their admittance into heaven. This is due to the fact that God has given us enormous blessings. Were we to spend all our time in prayer and devotion, we could still not thank God enough for what He has given us. Instead, it requires an act of God's grace, which He is certain to give for everyone who is sincere in faith. ʿĀ'ishah quotes the Prophet as saying:

> "Do the right things in moderation and rejoice. No action will be sufficient for anyone to enter heaven." People asked: "Not even you, Messenger of God?" He said: "Not even me, unless God will grant me His forgiveness and grace." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

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Love and Compassion

As a human being, Muhammad (peace be upon him) experienced all the feelings and emotions that ordinary people experience. He was very sensitive, and that made his feelings overflow. However, he kept his emotions controlled by his faith. The Prophet was a loving and caring man, and his love went out to a great variety of people. As a father, he was most loving and compassionate. The Prophet fundamentally changed the way the Arabs treated their children and demonstrated his love of his daughters. ʿĀ'ishah reports:

> I never saw anyone who looked like God's Messenger in her appearance, manners and walk than his daughter, Fāṭimah. When she came to visit the Prophet, he would stand up, kiss her and seat her in his place. When he visited her, she would stand up, kiss him and seat him in her place. (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.)

The Prophet's action here represented a departure from what the Arabs were used to. Prior to Islam, women were often ill-treated in Arabia. In some cases, if a young woman became a widow, her deceased husband's next of kin treated her as part of the estate left by his relative. He either married her or determined who could marry her. The birth of a daughter was received with gloom by her father. Young girls were buried alive for fear of poverty, because women did not earn a living.

The Prophet loved all people, and he cared deeply for his Companions, who believed in his message. He felt for them when they faced an adversity, and was generous to them with whatever he had. In Chapter 6 I related the story of Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh and how he invited the Prophet to come with a few people for a dinner at his home. The Prophet took everyone working in the digging of the dry moat to fortify Madinah. He also told Jābir's wife to have her meal and to give food to her neighbours.

There were many incidents like this during the Prophet's lifetime, and we will discuss this in a later chapter. Such incidents are not treated as miracles to prove the truth of Muhammad's message. Rather, this was an aspect of God's blessing, wherein the food was increased so that it sufficed to feed the entire group. The incident, however, indicates how the Prophet was aware of the conditions under which his Companions worked. He realized that they were in poverty and they needed food. His own hunger and the prospect of having a good meal did not distract him from the need to look after his Companions. He wanted them all

to share in the comfort that the hot meal represented. He trusted to God to bless the meal and increase the food.

The Prophet was certain that the message he received from God was the truth, and that it would bring people happiness in this life and in the life to come. If they rejected it, they would expose themselves to God's punishment in the life to come, as well as unhappiness in this present life. Therefore, he did all he could to persuade them to accept it. He wished them well, even when they were very harsh to him and to his Companions. Whenever he saw the slightest indication that anyone might pay some attention to what he advocated, he would go to them and show them all his love and care. Their hostility never deterred him from trying, and he readily forgave their abusive remarks and insults. When a hardened opponent turned to him in a positive gesture, he welcomed him with open arms. One good example is that of ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl who followed his father's example in doing everything possible to undermine Islam. He was in the enemy camp for 21 years. Ultimately, ʿIkrimah's wife persuaded him to change his attitude to Islam as it was motivated by considerations of pride and nurtured hatred. He accompanied her to Madinah to meet the Prophet. As the Prophet saw him coming into the mosque, he told his Companions not to speak ill of his father, because "speaking ill of the dead does not harm them, but offends their living relatives." He welcomed ʿIkrimah, describing him as the "immigrant rider."[1]

How about hate? The question here is how the opposite emotion to love affected the Prophet? The Prophet never expressed a feeling of hate for anyone; not even for his most hardened opponents. Indeed, a person could be guilty of a wicked plot against the Prophet, but the moment that person changed his attitude, the Prophet accepted and welcomed him, entertaining no grudge. For example, when the Prophet marched into Makkah and it fell to Islam with very little fighting, many people remained who still harboured grudges against the Prophet personally and against Islam. Fuḍālah was one of these. He was walking behind the Prophet as the Prophet was performing his circumambulation (i.e. *ṭawāf*) around the Kaʿbah. Fuḍālah thought, "If I kill him now, I would not care what happens to me after that. I would have avenged the Quraysh against him." As he drew closer, the Prophet turned to him and said: "Fuḍālah?" He answered: "Yes, Messenger of God." The Prophet asked: "What were you thinking?" He said: "Nothing, I was just performing my *ṭawāf*." The Prophet smiled and put his hand against Fuḍālah's chest, close to his heart. Fuḍālah said afterwards: "When he lifted his hand, no one was dearer to me than Muhammad."[2]

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Yet, the Prophet sometimes expressed a strong dislike toward some people. He said: "Among those of you I dislike most are the chatterers and pedants who excessively stress their eloquence." There are similar *aḥādīth* that speak of qualities and manners that are generally frowned upon. The Prophet himself expresses dislike of such qualities. This shows that his negative feelings were moderated by his understanding of his role and by his faith in God. When we surrender to God, accepting whatever God determines for us, we begin to look at things in a different light, such that our personal interests become less important than our wider ones. In the case of the Prophet, his focus was always on getting people to understand the message he delivered so that they could adopt an informed attitude to it.

Negative Emotions

To what extent did negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and fear affect the Prophet? As a human Messenger who was living in the midst of a human community and advocating a Divine message that required people to abide by certain teachings, Muhammad (peace be upon him) experienced all human emotions. The task assigned to him included the provision of a role model for all mankind. God tells us in the Qur'ān: "In God's Messenger you have a good model for everyone who looks with hope to God and the Last Day, and always remembers God." (33: 21) Without experiencing such emotions, he would not have been able to provide such a model.

People often yield to temptation when position, wealth, power, sex and the like are on offer. The Prophet was offered all these more than once. For example, ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah was the chief of the ʿAbd Shams clan of the Quraysh, and was highly respected by all people in Arabia. He was on the moderate side of the Quraysh. He did not like the polarization that was taking place between the new Muslims and the rest of the people of Makkah. One day he saw the Prophet worshipping at the Kaʿbah. He spoke to him, hoping to reach some understanding with him. He addressed him in a very gentle manner, highlighting the problem before making him the following offers: "My nephew, if you have started this affair hoping to make money out of it, we are all willing to give you some of our own wealth so that you would be the richest among us. If it is honour and position you want, we will make you our master and seek your advice in all matters. If it is a throne you are after, we will make you our king. If, on the other hand, you are possessed and are unable to resist what overwhelms you, we will spare no expense in seeking a medical cure for you."

The Prophet's reply consisted of reciting to ʿUtbah the first 38 verses of *Sūrah* 41 of the Qur'ān, and ʿUtbah listened attentively. When the Prophet finished his recitation, the Prophet prostrated himself in humble devotion to God, before saying to ʿUtbah: "You have heard what I have to say and you can make up your own mind."[3] That recitation explained to ʿUtbah the basic principles of Islam, coupled with God's warning of severe punishment for those who reject His faith. ʿUtbah realized that the Prophet would agree to no compromise. He therefore went back to his people and suggested to them that they should leave Muhammad alone, and let him carry his message wherever he wanted. He reasoned that if Muhammad achieved honour and power, they would benefit by that; if others killed him, then the Quraysh would have been spared the need to do that themselves.

The offer included everything people covet and often fall for. Sometimes the temptation is too strong that resistance requires great strength that can only be supplied by a strong belief in one's principles. The process of hesitation between the temptation and resistance is often referred to in Islamic terminology as listening to one's own Satan. The Prophet mentioned this to his Companions. In explanation he told them that everyone had their own Satan tempting them to commit different sins. They asked him whether he also had a Satan doing the same. He said: "Yes, I have; but God has helped me against him and now he only tells me what is good."

Such help has always been given to Prophets and Messengers. They are guides who help communities through life, pointing the way to the true faith and correct understanding of God, man and the bond between them. This enables God's Messengers to moderate the negative feelings and emotions, and to broaden their perspective. They are thus able to shoulder the responsibilities that they undertake when they accept the role assigned to them.

Anger is a natural human trait, and everyone may become angry, although some people are quick tempered and become angry very easily. The Prophet was keen to impress on his Companions the fact that anger can make people do what they will soon regret. Therefore, he counselled them against allowing their anger to get the better of them. He says: "Strength is not to overpower people; real strength is to control oneself when angry." (Related by al-Bukhārī.) One of the Prophet's Companions requested the Prophet's advice. The Prophet said to him: "Do not get angry." The man repeated his request several times and every time the Prophet said "Do not get angry." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) Needless to say, the Prophet did not mean that the man should not feel angry,

[3] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, ibid., vol. 1, p. 313.

Yet, the Prophet sometimes expressed a strong dislike toward some people. He said: "Among those of you I dislike most are the chatterers and pedants who excessively stress their eloquence." There are similar *aḥādīth* that speak of qualities and manners that are generally frowned upon. The Prophet himself expresses dislike of such qualities. This shows that his negative feelings were moderated by his understanding of his role and by his faith in God. When we surrender to God, accepting whatever God determines for us, we begin to look at things in a different light, such that our personal interests become less important than our wider ones. In the case of the Prophet, his focus was always on getting people to understand the message he delivered so that they could adopt an informed attitude to it.

Negative Emotions

To what extent did negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and fear affect the Prophet? As a human Messenger who was living in the midst of a human community and advocating a Divine message that required people to abide by certain teachings, Muhammad (peace be upon him) experienced all human emotions. The task assigned to him included the provision of a role model for all mankind. God tells us in the Qur'ān: "In God's Messenger you have a good model for everyone who looks with hope to God and the Last Day, and always remembers God." (33: 21) Without experiencing such emotions, he would not have been able to provide such a model.

People often yield to temptation when position, wealth, power, sex and the like are on offer. The Prophet was offered all these more than once. For example, ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah was the chief of the ʿAbd Shams clan of the Quraysh, and was highly respected by all people in Arabia. He was on the moderate side of the Quraysh. He did not like the polarization that was taking place between the new Muslims and the rest of the people of Makkah. One day he saw the Prophet worshipping at the Kaʿbah. He spoke to him, hoping to reach some understanding with him. He addressed him in a very gentle manner, highlighting the problem before making him the following offers: "My nephew, if you have started this affair hoping to make money out of it, we are all willing to give you some of our own wealth so that you would be the richest among us. If it is honour and position you want, we will make you our master and seek your advice in all matters. If it is a throne you are after, we will make you our king. If, on the other hand, you are possessed and are unable to resist what overwhelms you, we will spare no expense in seeking a medical cure for you."

The Prophet's reply consisted of reciting to ʿUtbah the first 38 verses of *Sūrah* 41 of the Qur'ān, and ʿUtbah listened attentively. When the Prophet finished his recitation, the Prophet prostrated himself in humble devotion to God, before saying to ʿUtbah: "You have heard what I have to say and you can make up your own mind."[3] That recitation explained to ʿUtbah the basic principles of Islam, coupled with God's warning of severe punishment for those who reject His faith. ʿUtbah realized that the Prophet would agree to no compromise. He therefore went back to his people and suggested to them that they should leave Muhammad alone, and let him carry his message wherever he wanted. He reasoned that if Muhammad achieved honour and power, they would benefit by that; if others killed him, then the Quraysh would have been spared the need to do that themselves.

The offer included everything people covet and often fall for. Sometimes the temptation is too strong that resistance requires great strength that can only be supplied by a strong belief in one's principles. The process of hesitation between the temptation and resistance is often referred to in Islamic terminology as listening to one's own Satan. The Prophet mentioned this to his Companions. In explanation he told them that everyone had their own Satan tempting them to commit different sins. They asked him whether he also had a Satan doing the same. He said: "Yes, I have; but God has helped me against him and now he only tells me what is good."

Such help has always been given to Prophets and Messengers. They are guides who help communities through life, pointing the way to the true faith and correct understanding of God, man and the bond between them. This enables God's Messengers to moderate the negative feelings and emotions, and to broaden their perspective. They are thus able to shoulder the responsibilities that they undertake when they accept the role assigned to them.

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because anger is the result of things that are hardly within our control, and is a reaction to what may happen or what others may say or do. The Prophet's advice should be understood as telling us not to act when in a state of anger.

The Prophet even pointed out to us the way to reduce our anger very quickly. Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad reports:

> Two people quarrelled in the Prophet's presence, and we were sitting with him. One of them was angry, calling the other names and his face was red with anger. The Prophet said: "I know a word which will make his anger dissipate if he would just say it. It is: I seek refuge with God against Satan, the accursed." People said to the man: "Haven't you heard what the Prophet has just said." The man said: "I am not mad." (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

Was the Prophet ever angry? Certainly he felt angry at times. However, he never showed anger for anything that related to him personally. He showed and expressed his anger if the boundaries set by God were encroached upon. Abū Mas'ūd reports:

> A man said to the Prophet: "I often come late to the dawn prayer because of our imam. He makes the prayer too long." I never saw the Prophet getting to such a state of anger in any situation when he gave admonition. He said: "People, watch what you do. Some of you cause others to stay away. Whoever leads a congregational prayer should make it short. There may be in the congregation people who are ill, elderly or ones who have something urgent to attend to." (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

The fact that the Prophet was never seen in a state of anger over any personal matter shows how God enabled him to temper his negative emotions. However, when it was a question of religion or the violation of Divine guidance, his anger was clearly seen. Nevertheless, he did not act until his anger had subsided.

Anxiety is another negative emotion that can bring a person down. Did the Prophet ever suffer from anxiety? The Prophet was a very sensitive person and he loved his people. As a firm believer in God, he never showed any anxiety about his own affairs. Even in the most dangerous situations, he acted showing absolutely no concern about what might happen to him. We see this in the Battles of Uḥud and Ḥunayn, when the Muslim army was on the retreat and he was left with a very small number of his Companions. In these instances, he moved towards the enemy fearing nothing. By contrast, when the going was rough, he

showed much concern about what might happen to the Muslim community. Just before the Battle of Badr, when a small and poorly equipped contingent of his Companions were facing a much larger force of the unbelievers, his anxiety about what might happen to them was evident. He prayed earnestly to God to spare them and grant them victory. In his supplication he appealed to God, saying: "My Lord, should this band of people perish, You will not be worshipped." He stressed the fact that the Muslim community was the only community on earth who worshipped God alone with total sincerity. Likewise, when the Prophet saw clouds moving over Madinah, his unease was evident. His wife asked him what troubled him. He said: "An earlier community were punished by rain. How can I tell that this will not bring about a form of punishment?" When it rained, his anxiety would disappear.

Fear is another emotion that is normally seen to be negative, but it certainly has its positive aspects, as it is linked to man's instinct for survival. People normally fear anything that threatens their life or exposes them to danger or harm. Moreover, moderate fear helps to prevent recklessness. Fearless people, could rashly put themselves or their families in danger. On the other hand, when people allow fear to dictate their behaviour, they may lose much of their self-esteem. Under a dictatorship, people's fear of dissent often leads them to accept humiliation. Therefore, the right balance should be maintained.

In the Qur'ān, we learn that Prophet Moses felt fear on more than one occasion. Before prophethood, he had to flee from Egypt for fear of his life. Having killed an Egyptian, he walked in the town as "fearful, vigilant."[4] His fear was well warranted, as he soon received advice that people were plotting to kill him. Later, when God wanted him to see the signs he was given to prove his status as Messenger of God, he was told to throw down his staff. "But when he saw it moving, as if it were a serpent, he turned and fled, with no thought of turning back. [God said]: 'Moses! Draw near and have no fear! You are certainly secure.'" (28: 31) These are normal feelings: who would not shudder with fear when he sees that the moment he throws down his walking stick, it moves fast like a serpent? God's Messengers are normal human beings – except for the fact that they receive revelations from on high – and they experience all human feelings and emotions. However, they deal with them properly.

The same applied to the Prophet. As mentioned in Chapter 1, when the angel Gabriel came to him for the first time, the experience was too much for him. He ran from the cave where he was alone and did not stop until he reached his home, which was a few kilometres away. He told his wife to cover him as he

[4] The Qur'ān: 28: 18

was trembling. Again, this is a normal feeling: who would not feel panic to see a winged creature holding a book and pressing it on his chest until he almost chokes, simply because he protests that he cannot read? The angel repeated this three times, and each time Muhammad felt himself about to die. The only thing that stopped this pressing and choking was when he asked: "What shall I read?" Later, when he came to, he said to his wife: "I feared for myself." She reassured him, saying that a man with his noble qualities could not be harmed by evil forces.

His Companions, however, describe him as being the bravest of all people. When they were in battle and things were going hard, they moved close to him, deriving from his courage. There is no doubt that he was never in fear for his life throughout the twenty-three years of his mission. We may then conclude that, prior to prophethood, Muhammad experienced the normal sort of fear in situations that make people afraid. After he became God's Messenger, his self-surrender to God enabled him to remove the feeling of fear for himself or his life. He trusted that whatever God willed for him was the best option. This is the attitude of a true believer.

In conclusion, Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a man with a noble character. All the noble qualities were demonstrated by him at their best. He was a man who experienced all other emotions that people experience. However, his communication with the angel who brought him God's revelations helped him to enhance all the positive human qualities of and reduce to a minimum all negative traits.

CHAPTER 9

MERCY TO ALL

A SHORT VERSE in the Qur'ān gives a very precise definition of the mission assigned to the Prophet when God chose him to be His final Messenger to mankind: "We have sent you as a [manifestation of Our] grace towards all the worlds." (21: 107) The style of the Qur'ān combines several pairs of qualities that are very difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to combine. One of these pairs is *word economy* and *expansive meaning*. In the verse quoted here, the words "manifestation of Our" have been added in the translation to the original text to make it easier to understand. The Arabic original remains wider in scope, and it also means that the Prophet himself was full of compassion. This aspect is added to the fact that it was God's mercy that necessitated that a Prophet is sent to deliver God's final message to mankind.

The verse speaks of compassion to "all the worlds." Some people understand this phrase to encompass all mankind; but this limits its meaning. Rather, His compassion encompasses all creatures, including animals and plants. When we study his life, we see compassion permeating all his actions. Severity was unknown to him. Compassion influenced all his actions in all situations. Indeed, it influenced the way he dealt with his enemies. He never despaired of anyone being able to accept the truth of the Divine message, and he was delighted with every newcomer to Islam. He felt that by adopting Islam, a person not only sets out on the correct course to a better type of life in this world, but also hopes to earn God's mercy on the Day of Judgement. Hence, the Prophet was keen to address even his most hardened opponents, to explain the essence of his message to them, and to call on them to believe in God's Oneness.

When the going was difficult and the unbelievers were putting up fierce opposition to his call, persecuting his followers and subjecting them to torture, the believers would have been tempted to invoke God's curses on those who

was trembling. Again, this is a normal feeling: who would not feel panic to see a winged creature holding a book and pressing it on his chest until he almost chokes, simply because he protests that he cannot read? The angel repeated this three times, and each time Muhammad felt himself about to die. The only thing that stopped this pressing and choking was when he asked: "What shall I read?" Later, when he came to, he said to his wife: "I feared for myself." She reassured him, saying that a man with his noble qualities could not be harmed by evil forces.

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When the going was difficult and the unbelievers were putting up fierce opposition to his call, persecuting his followers and subjecting them to torture, the believers would have been tempted to invoke God's curses on those who

sought to suppress the truth and persecuted its advocates. It is only natural that the oppressed should seek God's help against their oppressors. Most certainly, the Muslims were oppressed throughout the Makkan period, like they are today in many parts of the world. Hence, the Prophet's Companions who found themselves under immense pressure sought his help in dealing with their difficulty. Abū Hurayrah mentions: "It was said to the Prophet: 'God's Messenger! Pray to God against the idolaters.' He replied: 'I have not been sent to curse people; I have been sent as mercy to mankind.'" (Related by Muslim, and by al-Bukhārī in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*.)

The Prophet saw his mission as an act of grace and mercy by God to all mankind. As such, invoking God's curses on any group of people was incompatible with his mission, even when these people were opposed to Islam and were using all their power and resources to undermine it. Although a certain person may deserve to be cursed because of his evil deeds, this does not justify saying a general curse, even against idolaters who worship statues instead of God. The Prophet understood this well, and endeavoured to enhance his native quality of compassion so as to be merciful and compassionate to all people at all times.

When the Prophet commanded a military expedition, he ensured compliance by Islamic standards of war ethics. When he sent such an expedition, he always urged his commanders and soldiers to observe these ethics. Anas ibn Mālik reports that the Prophet would say to them:

> March by God's name and help, and on the basis of the message of God's Messenger. Do not kill an elderly person, a child, a youth or a woman. Do not hoard anything of war gains, but group them together. Put things right and do well, for God loves those who do well.[1]

This is confirmed in several *aḥādīth*, some of which add the prohibition of cutting trees and marching through agricultural land. The Prophet always felt that the enemies of Islam were misguided people. If he had to fight them, it was only because they were the aggressors. However, to him, that did not justify killing anyone who is not a combatant. The elderly, the young and women did not carry arms. Therefore, the Prophet stated that Muslims must not kill them.

No Lasting Enmity

Even when Muhammad himself, or the Muslim community in general, faced great hardship, he extended kind treatment to those who were hostile, always

[1] Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* (Book of Jihad), Chapter 90.

hoping that they would modify their hostility. I mentioned in Chapter 2 that, after ten years of advocating his message in Makkah against much hostility by its people, the Prophet went to Taif, and how its people and chiefs were extremely hostile to the extent of physical abuse. God sent him angels, offering to punish them as he would command, including their total destruction. He said: "I hope that God will bring out of their offspring people who worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him."[2]

An individual opponent who goes to extremes of enmity then falls in his opponent's hands may present a strong temptation to the victor to kill or to impose severe physical and mental punishment. The Prophet had no shortage of these hardened opponents, some of whom added active enmity to verbal abuse and ridicule. Nevertheless, whenever any of them came to him, either alone or with an intermediary, declaring loyalty, the Prophet accepted them without hesitation.

The hostility of some unbelievers was exceptionally painful to the Prophet, because he had expected them to be friendly to him. Among them were al-Mughīrah (Abū Sufyān) ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and Abdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah. The two were cousins of the Prophet, and al-Mughīrah was his playmate in childhood. When the Prophet received his message, al-Mughīrah chose to be very hostile to him and attacked him in his poetry. ʿAbdullāh ibn Abī Umayyah had been very abusive to the Prophet in the past, despite the fact that his mother was the Prophet's aunt. At one time he said to the Prophet that he would never believe in him until he had seen him climb a ladder right to the sky and return with a written testimony that he was God's Messenger, bringing with him four angels to give evidence. The abuse of near relatives is especially painful. Hence, the Prophet was not keen to meet either of these two men, and when he was informed of their approach, he refused to receive them.

Umm Salamah, one of the Prophet's wives, tried to mediate on behalf of the two men as one of them, ʿAbdullāh, was her brother. She said to the Prophet: "God's Messenger, they are your own cousins and kinsfolk." He replied: "I have no need of them. My cousin defamed me, and my aunt's son was the one who said what you know in Makkah."[3]

When they were informed of what the Prophet said, they felt that they were in a very bad position, and they did not know what to do. Al-Mughīrah, who had his son with him, said: "If he will not receive me, I will take this son of mine by the hand and we will both wander through the land until we die of starvation

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and thirst." Advice was then given to them by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who was a cousin of both the Prophet and al-Mughīrah. Acting on this advice, they went straight to him and said "Indeed, God has granted you a better status than ours, and we have indeed been in the wrong." (12: 91) These were the words that had been said by Prophet Joseph's brothers when they recognized him, as reported in the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Prophet used the same reply of Prophet Joseph, telling them: "No blame shall be attached to you this day. May God forgive you. He is indeed the most Merciful." (12: 92) Thus, al-Mughīrah and his relative were rehabilitated.

The Prophet had ordered two men, ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl and Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, to be killed at the time when he took over Makkah. ʿIkrimah's father was the most hardened opponent of Islam, from its first day until his death in the Battle of Badr. For fifteen years, Abū Jahl continued to do his utmost to suppress Islam, and he had tortured and killed some of the early Muslims. He even tried to kill the Prophet on more than one occasion. ʿIkrimah had the same attitude of his father. When the Prophet entered Makkah, he tried to put up a fight against the Muslim army, but was soon defeated. He then fled to Yemen. His wife, Umm Ḥakīm, went to the Prophet and pledged loyalty to him as a Muslim. She then appealed to him on ʿIkrimah's behalf. She said that she would go to Yemen to bring him. She brought him to Madinah. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when the Prophet saw him coming, he told his Companions not to abuse his father. He said: "Such abuse hurts the living and does no harm to the dead." As ʿIkrimah arrived, the Prophet welcomed him, saying: "Welcome to the immigrant rider."[4] He repeated that three times.

A similar case involves Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, who belonged to a family of fine poets (indeed, his father's poetry continues to be studied in Arab schools and universities). His brother, Bujayr, also a poet, was a Companion of the Prophet. Kaʿb, however, used his poetry as a weapon in the war against Islam. At the time, poetry in Arabia played a significant role, similar to today's radio and television media. Kaʿb continued to attack Islam in his poetry for over twenty years. When Makkah fell to Islam and most parts of Arabia became Muslim, Kaʿb was warned by his brother Bujayr that he should consider his position and either accept Islam or remove himself from Arabia. Kaʿb chose the first course, and composed a poem praising the Prophet and went to him in Madinah:

> After the morning prayer in the mosque, he went straight to the Prophet and said: "Messenger of God, Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr has repented of everything

[4] Al-Ḥākim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 242.

> that he did or said against Islam in the past. Would you accept him and forgive him if he came to you and declared his repentance?" The Prophet answered in the affirmative. He then said: "Messenger of God, I am Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr." At this moment, a man from the Anṣār jumped up and said to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, allow me to kill this enemy of God." The Prophet said to him: "Leave him alone. He has come here a repentant man, motivated by his new faith."[5]

Thus, Kaʿb was admitted into the Islamic fold. He recited to the Prophet his poem, in which he expressed his apology for his past attitude and described his fear when he was in hiding, and the fact that many people considered that he would inevitably be killed. He also expressed his hope that he would be pardoned and praised the Prophet and his Companions.

Even with Hypocrites

Perhaps a more significant example is the case of ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy who, prior to Islam, was a very important figure in Madinah. In fact, its people were about to crown him king when Islam began to make inroads among its populations. Perhaps because of this, he felt unhappy about the arrival of the Prophet and his Companions in Madinah. At first he stood apart from the Muslims of Madinah, but after the Battle of Badr he felt that Islam was increasing in strength. He declared himself a Muslim, but in reality he was not: his declaration was hypocritical. In fact, he was the chief hypocrite in Madinah. Because he had considerable support, he was able to gather around him a number of people who were of similar tendency. He kept close association with the Jews in Madinah, encouraging them in their hostility to the Prophet and Islam. He did much to undermine Islam in the city. Just before the Battle of Uḥud, he withdrew from the Muslim army, taking with him about one third of the soldiers. After the expedition of al-Muṣṭalaq, he started the false rumour about the Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'ishah, alleging that she had been in association with a young man. That caused the Prophet and his household much pain, until God, in the Qur'ān, declared her innocent. ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy also threatened to drive the Prophet and his Companions out of Madinah. He encouraged one tribe of Jews after another to fight the Muslims. His actions showed that he was indeed an enemy of Islam, but he pretended to be a Muslim.

However, the Prophet never treated Ibn Ubayy in any way other than respect and kindness. When Ibn Ubayy threatened to drive the Prophet away from

[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 149.

and thirst." Advice was then given to them by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who was a cousin of both the Prophet and al-Mughīrah. Acting on this advice, they went straight to him and said "Indeed, God has granted you a better status than ours, and we have indeed been in the wrong." (12: 91) These were the words that had been said by Prophet Joseph's brothers when they recognized him, as reported in the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Prophet used the same reply of Prophet Joseph, telling them: "No blame shall be attached to you this day. May God forgive you. He is indeed the most Merciful." (12: 92) Thus, al-Mughīrah and his relative were rehabilitated.

The Prophet had ordered two men, ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl and Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, to be killed at the time when he took over Makkah. ʿIkrimah's father was the most hardened opponent of Islam, from its first day until his death in the Battle of Badr. For fifteen years, Abū Jahl continued to do his utmost to suppress Islam, and he had tortured and killed some of the early Muslims. He even tried to kill the Prophet on more than one occasion. ʿIkrimah had the same attitude of his father. When the Prophet entered Makkah, he tried to put up a fight against the Muslim army, but was soon defeated. He then fled to Yemen. His wife, Umm Ḥakīm, went to the Prophet and pledged loyalty to him as a Muslim. She then appealed to him on ʿIkrimah's behalf. She said that she would go to Yemen to bring him. She brought him to Madinah. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when the Prophet saw him coming, he told his Companions not to abuse his father. He said: "Such abuse hurts the living and does no harm to the dead." As ʿIkrimah arrived, the Prophet welcomed him, saying: "Welcome to the immigrant rider."[4] He repeated that three times.

A similar case involves Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, who belonged to a family of fine poets (indeed, his father's poetry continues to be studied in Arab schools and universities). His brother, Bujayr, also a poet, was a Companion of the Prophet. Kaʿb, however, used his poetry as a weapon in the war against Islam. At the time, poetry in Arabia played a significant role, similar to today's radio and television media. Kaʿb continued to attack Islam in his poetry for over twenty years. When Makkah fell to Islam and most parts of Arabia became Muslim, Kaʿb was warned by his brother Bujayr that he should consider his position and either accept Islam or remove himself from Arabia. Kaʿb chose the first course, and composed a poem praising the Prophet and went to him in Madinah:

> After the morning prayer in the mosque, he went straight to the Prophet and said: "Messenger of God, Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr has repented of everything that he did or said against Islam in the past. Would you accept him and forgive him if he came to you and declared his repentance?" The Prophet answered in the affirmative. He then said: "Messenger of God, I am Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr." At this moment, a man from the Anṣār jumped up and said to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, allow me to kill this enemy of God." The Prophet said to him: "Leave him alone. He has come here a repentant man, motivated by his new faith."[5]

[4] Al-Ḥākim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 242.

Thus, Kaʿb was admitted into the Islamic fold. He recited to the Prophet his poem, in which he expressed his apology for his past attitude and described his fear when he was in hiding, and the fact that many people considered that he would inevitably be killed. He also expressed his hope that he would be pardoned and praised the Prophet and his Companions.

Even with Hypocrites

Perhaps a more significant example is the case of ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy who, prior to Islam, was a very important figure in Madinah. In fact, its people were about to crown him king when Islam began to make inroads among its populations. Perhaps because of this, he felt unhappy about the arrival of the Prophet and his Companions in Madinah. At first he stood apart from the Muslims of Madinah, but after the Battle of Badr he felt that Islam was increasing in strength. He declared himself a Muslim, but in reality he was not: his declaration was hypocritical. In fact, he was the chief hypocrite in Madinah. Because he had considerable support, he was able to gather around him a number of people who were of similar tendency. He kept close association with the Jews in Madinah, encouraging them in their hostility to the Prophet and Islam. He did much to undermine Islam in the city. Just before the Battle of Uḥud, he withdrew from the Muslim army, taking with him about one third of the soldiers. After the expedition of al-Muṣṭalaq, he started the false rumour about the Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'ishah, alleging that she had been in association with a young man. That caused the Prophet and his household much pain, until God, in the Qur'ān, declared her innocent. ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy also threatened to drive the Prophet and his Companions out of Madinah. He encouraged one tribe of Jews after another to fight the Muslims. His actions showed that he was indeed an enemy of Islam, but he pretended to be a Muslim.

However, the Prophet never treated Ibn Ubayy in any way other than respect and kindness. When Ibn Ubayy threatened to drive the Prophet away from

[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 149.

Madinah, some Muslims suggested that the Prophet should order his execution. Indeed, Ibn Ubayy's own son, who was a true believer, told the Prophet that he himself would kill his father should the Prophet order that. The Prophet smiled and said: "We will be kind to him and treat him well as long as he is with us."[6]

The hypocrites knew what sort of person the Prophet was and that his message was true. However, they could not bring themselves to accept Islam fully and live like Muslims. The Prophet was commanded by God to accept what they professed and leave their judgement to God. In accordance with this, the Prophet went as far as visiting Ibn Ubayy at home when he was sick. Ibn Ubayy felt that his illness could be terminal, and he made some requests of the Prophet: he asked Muhammad to offer the *janāzah* prayer for him when he died, to send his shirt to his family so that it would be used as part of the shroud for his body when he was prepared for burial, and to pray to God to forgive him. When Ibn Ubayy died, the Prophet did all that he had requested. 'Umar objected, on the grounds that Ibn Ubayy had intentionally tried to undermine Islam. The Prophet responded: "Leave me alone, 'Umar. I have been given a choice to pray or not to pray for them [i.e. the hypocrites]. I will pray for his forgiveness more than seventy times." The Prophet's answer was in reference to the Qur'ānic verse that speaks about the hypocrites:

> You may pray for their forgiveness or may not pray for them, [for it will all be the same]. Even if you were to pray seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them, for they have denied God and His Messenger. God does not guide those who are transgressors. (9: 80)

The Prophet even followed Ibn Ubayy's funeral until he was buried.[7] It should be added that shortly after that a verse was revealed ordering the Prophet not to offer the prayer for the deceased (i.e. *janāzah* prayer) for any of the hypocrites.

Here is compassion at its most encompassing. Ibn Ubayy was very hostile to the Prophet and to his message, and he tried hard to undermine the Prophet's position and the Muslim community. When he died, he was no longer of any consequence. By that time, most of his supporters had either become true Muslims or became totally ineffective. Neither the Prophet nor the Muslim community would gain anything through kindness to him. Yet the Prophet would pray more than seventy times for his forgiveness.

The Prophet's kind treatment of his enemies was not extended only to individuals. When the chiefs of the tribe of Hawāzin, who had fought the Muslims

[6] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 3, p. 336.
[7] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Book of Commentary on the Qur'ān). Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 4, p. 210.

in a fierce battle, came to the Prophet appealing for his kindness, he freed from slavery thousands of their women and children.[8] When Makkah fell to Islam without a fight, except for a small skirmish, the Prophet became master over the tribe that fought him for twenty years, and who had persecuted his followers, driven him out of his hometown, and sent armies to subdue him and his followers. Some of Muhammad's Companions felt that it was an occasion when the sanctuary of Makkah would be suspended to exact vengeance. The Prophet's attitude was contrary to this. When the people gathered around him to learn their fate, he asked them: "What do you think I shall do with you?" They said: "Only what is good. You are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother." He said: "You may all go free." This was an act of compassion en masse. Exacting revenge was against his nature; compassion to all was Muhammad's way to win people over.

I have dwelt here on the Prophet's treatment of his enemies, because this reflects the work of compassion against the strong temptation of seeking revenge. The Prophet never shrank away from going to war when that was necessary to defend Islam and his community. When the enemy was subdued, kindness and compassion were Muhammad's preferred option.

New Set of Values

Leaders often stress the importance of their leadership. They endeavour, in a variety of ways, to demonstrate that without them, the country, the party or the group they lead would be in a much worse position. The Prophet never did so. Rather, he stressed the fact that he was God's Messenger, as it was very important to do so. People needed to be reminded that when he conveyed to them something related to faith, or explained what was acceptable or unacceptable, he was giving them God's orders. Apart from that, he claimed nothing for himself. On the contrary, he emphasized that he was an ordinary human being, with all the feelings, emotions, and frailties that apply to all mankind. However, the fact that his mission was an act of God's grace to all the worlds shined throughout his life. At the time, a prominent characteristic of the Arabs was hard-heartedness. The nature of their tribal society, which meant that tribes often raided each other and took pride in the gains they made in such raids, and the desert environment that they lived in, which made most of them nomads, left no room for soft heartedness. They valued such characteristics as hospitality, courage and integrity, but they considered soft heartedness unmanly. Zuhayr

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ibn Abī Sulmā, a famous poet of that era, declared: "He who does not defend his honour with his sword will leave it exposed to attack; and he who does not deal unjustly with others will suffer injustice."

The Prophet gave the Arabs, and mankind in general, an entirely different set of values. He wanted compassion to replace severity in their dealings with others. He often demonstrated, practically, a virtue that he wished the people to adopt. He had penetrative insight into people's characters, so he gave to each person according to their needs. Often, he made this come naturally so that his interlocutor would not take it as pointed criticism. The important aspect of this is that the Prophet gave them what was certain to improve their characters and their relations with others.

For example, al-Aqraʿ ibn Ḥābis, the chief of the Tamīm tribe, was a hard man who felt that he should show no softness. On a visit to Madinah, the Prophet wanted to give him a practical piece of advice. Abū Hurayrah reports:

> The Prophet kissed al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī when al-Aqraʿ ibn Ḥābis al-Tamīmī was sitting with him. Al-Aqraʿ said to him: "I have ten children and I never kissed any of them." The Prophet looked at him and said: "A person who shows no compassion will receive none." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Aḥmad.)

Al-Ḥasan, the Prophet's grandson, was less than eight years old when the Prophet passed away. He certainly loved al-Ḥasan dearly and enjoyed playing with him. Since God had made the Prophet a fine example for Muslims and had ordered them to follow his practice, he was keen to demonstrate the fine qualities that increased mutual love and care within the family and the community. Kissing his grandson in front of a tribal chief and other guests pointed out to such men, some of whom were known for their hardness, that manly qualities are not inconsistent with love and compassion towards the young. Al-Aqraʿ's remark of surprise presented nothing to be proud of, and this is the reason for the Prophet's response.

The Prophet demonstrated similar compassion on numerous occasions, so that this would be widely reported and so that many people would follow his example. Al-Barā' ibn ʿĀzib reports: "I saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) carrying al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī on his shoulder and saying: 'My Lord! I love this boy, so please love him as well.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah.)

The Prophet's care for young children did not stop with boys who were close to him. Indeed he cared for all children, although those who were related to

him enjoyed his love in a very noticeable way. Abū Qatādah al-Sulamī reports: "The Prophet prayed carrying Umāmah bint Zaynab, his granddaughter. When he was standing he carried her, but when he prostrated himself, he put her on the floor." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and al-Nasā'ī.) Another version of this *ḥadīth* quotes Abū Qatādah as saying:

> I saw the Prophet leading a congregational prayer while carrying on his shoulder Umāmah bint Abi al-ʿĀṣ, whose mother was his daughter Zaynab. When he bowed in *rukūʿ*, he put her on the floor, and when he arose from prostration, he carried her. (Related by Muslim.)

This highly authentic *ḥadīth* shows that the Prophet also cared for girls, as much as he cared for boys. Umāmah was his granddaughter, and he did not only show that he loved her, but he also carried her as he was leading an obligatory congregational prayer. This he did in a society where until recently people received the birth of a girl with too much gloom, and often buried little girls alive for fear of poverty. Yet the Prophet demonstrated his love of the girl in the best way, carrying her while he was leading the prayer. Even today, many people would frown if it is suggested to them that they could carry a child while praying. They would object even more strongly if the child was a girl. Some people would even suggest that carrying a boy in prayer is permissible, but not a girl. In fact, the Prophet did this to demonstrate the opposite, because Islam does not differentiate between girls and boys. All children have equal rights that must be fulfilled by their parents, families and the Muslim community.

> The Prophet went further than that in demonstrating the importance of taking good care of young children, particularly one's own. He was delivering the Friday sermon in the mosque, when his two grandsons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, came in, wearing red shirts. They were walking unsteadily: tripping and rising again. He came down from the pulpit and placed them near him. He then said to the congregation: "God and His Messenger tell the truth: 'Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation.' (64: 15) I saw my two grandsons and I felt a strong urge to come down and pick them up." He then continued his sermon.[9]

In the Arabian society of the time, attending to a child in this way, by stopping a sermon addressed to a large congregation, must have come as a strong shock.

[9] Al-Ḥākim, *Al-Mustadrak*, vol. 1, p. 287.

The Prophet was educating his community using every method. When he saw two little boys, who were his grandsons, tripping and rising, he realized that this was an opportunity to teach by example. He told his congregation, in a practical way, that attending to a little child took precedence over addressing an adult congregation, even when that address was a part of worship. The effect of such practical education is enhanced by the fact that God has made it clear in the Qur'ān that the Prophet provides a good example for us to follow.[10]

His grandchildren were so dear to the Prophet that he would seek them and hold them. Abū Hurayrah reports:

> I was with God's Messenger (peace be upon him) in one of the markets in Madinah, and when he left I went with him. When he reached the yard in front of Fātimah's place, he called out to al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, saying: "O, Cutie! O, Cutie!" But no one answered him. He then left and went to ʿĀ'ishah's place. As he was there, al-Ḥasan came to him. I thought that his mother had detained him so that she could give him his beads to wear in his neck. When he came over the Prophet hugged him and he hugged the Prophet, who then said: "My Lord! I love him, so please love him and love everyone who loves him." He repeated this three times. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The Prophet is seen here as a grandfather, visiting his daughter's home to see her son. When the child came over to him, Muhammad hugged him. This is a normal behaviour of a grandfather cuddling his grandson. However, the Prophet added a prayer that expressed his passion for his grandchildren. He prayed that God would not only love the child, but also that He would love everyone who loves him. This is a prayer that could include every Muslim until the end of human life on earth, because Muslims love the Prophet and members of his household. They love most dearly those whom the Prophet loved most. Since this *ḥadīth*, and others similar to it, clearly state that the Prophet loved al-Ḥasan, we certainly love him and view him with reverence, hoping that we will receive some of the benefit of the Prophet's prayer.

Loss of One's Children

As noted in Chapter 1, the Prophet lost his two infant sons. However, as this was long before his Prophethood, there is no existing record of how the family

[10] The Qur'ān: 33: 21.

coped with the loss of these two young children. It appears, though, that infant mortality was accepted as normal, because its rates were high. Nevertheless, this would not decrease the sense of loss the parents must have felt at the death of a young child. The Prophet had a son born to him in his old age. The boy, who was called Ibrāhīm, was given to a woman who lived just outside Madinah to suckle. The Prophet used to visit this woman, whose husband was a blacksmith called Abū Sayf. Anas ibn Mālik reports:

> One day I followed the Prophet as he aimed to visit Abū Sayf. As we arrived he was using his bellows to keep the fire going, and the house was full of smoke. I went ahead of the Prophet and told Abū Sayf to hold his fire as the Prophet was coming. He did so. When the Prophet arrived, he asked for his son. He took him and held him close, kissing and smelling him, and he said whatever prayers he wished to say. I saw the child as life almost departed from him with the Prophet holding him. The Prophet's eyes were tearful, and he said: "The eye is tearful, the heart is full of grief, but we only say what will please God, our Lord. We are certainly grieved for losing you, Ibrāhīm." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.)

In one version of this *ḥadīth* it is reported that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf said to the Prophet as he saw him weeping: "And you cry, God's Messenger!" The Prophet said: "Ibn ʿAwf! It is an expression of compassion."

In this situation, the Prophet is a most loving and caring father, about to lose his youngest child. He is sad and sorrowful, but he does not forget for a moment that death is determined by God, and that we have no option but to accept God's will, whatever it happens to be. Ibrāhīm is said to have been only seventeen or eighteen months when he died.

Grief for the loss of a loved one is perfectly normal and acceptable, but it must be coupled with resigned acceptance of God's will. This is what is clear in the following report from Usāmah ibn Zayd:

> One of the Prophet's daughters[11] sent to him a message stating that a son of hers was dying and requested him to come over. He replied with a message starting with his greetings and adding: "To God belongs what He takes and what He gives. With Him everything occurs at its appointed

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time. She should remain steadfast and resigned to her loss." She sent a new message asking him by God to come over. He rose together with Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah, Muʿādh ibn Jabal, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Zayd ibn Thābit and others. The boy was handed over to the Prophet. His chest was noisy, almost like a waterskin that had become too dry. The Prophet's eyes were tearful. Saʿd said to him: 'How come, Messenger of God?' He said: "This is an expression of compassion God has placed in His creatures' hearts. God is merciful only to those of His servants who are merciful." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Mājah.)

The fact that on both occasions the Prophet was questioned for weeping because of the loss of a child tells us something about the Arabian society. At the time, this society considered weeping to be unbecoming of a man, even after the loss of a dear one. In fact, the loss of a child was not considered to be much of a tragedy. In both cases, the Prophet's words are educative: they show that weeping in such situations is an expression of mercy. In fact, the Prophet wept on other occasions, such as the death of ʿUthmān ibn Maẓʿūn and the illness of Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah.

Caring for All Children

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Such accidents occurred more than once. One of the Prophet's Companions mentions that he was with the Prophet when Muhammad had placed one of his grandsons, either al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn, in his lap:

> The boy urinated and I could see the urine running over the Prophet's waist. We jumped to stop him, but the Prophet said: "Leave my grandson; do not scare him." He called for some water and he poured it over the urine. (Related by Aḥmad.)

Those who were with the Prophet only thought of him, and were therefore concerned that the impurity of the urine should be stopped and cleaned. The Prophet, however, thought firstly of the child, telling his Companions to leave him alone.

Considering the Prophet's care for children, it is not surprising that Anas ibn Mālik, who was often with the Prophet, should say: "I never knew anyone more compassionate to young children than God's Messenger." (Related by Muslim.) The Prophet's care for mother and child is perhaps best manifested in the following *ḥadīth*, which is also reported by Anas ibn Mālik:

> The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I begin a prayer intending to make it long. I then hear a child crying, and I make my prayer short, because I know that the child's mother would be too concerned as she hears it cry." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah.)

This is a good example of how compassion can be put into practice. The Prophet may have been aware that everyone in the congregation was able and happy to offer a long prayer. Needless to say, hearing the Prophet reciting the Qur'ān in prayer is in itself a joy, and joining him in prayer is a great act of worship. Hence, his Companions were always keen to attend congregational prayer. A long prayer usually means listening to the Qur'ān being perfectly recited. However, the cry of a child made the Prophet change his intention and opt for a short but complete prayer. Although the Prophet would have been aware that the child was in no danger, and would not come to any harm if he cried a little, he realized that the child's mother would inevitably be distracted by his crying, and worried lest the child come to some harm or be in trouble. Hence, the Prophet would shorten his prayer to allow her to attend to her child. The whole congregation would thus find their prayer subject to the needs of a young child, who had expressed distress and demanded care. The compassion of the Prophet allows this. He was indeed most compassionate: "Indeed there

has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves: one who grieves much that you should suffer; one who is full of concern for you; and who is tender and full of compassion towards the believers." (9: 128)

Full of Compassion to All

God describes the Prophet as "tender and full of compassion towards the believers." (9: 128) Compassion overflowed from him and all sorts of people benefited by it. His compassion made him aware of the concerns of the people around him, even when they neither expressed nor hinted at these concerns. He encouraged his Companions to express their feelings, so that he would sort out their problems if that was within his ability. If they desired anything that was legitimate or permissible, he would help them to obtain it. Sometimes the Prophet received delegations from other tribes, who either wanted to find out about Islam, or who were Muslims and wanted to learn more about their faith so that they could relay it to their people. Mālik ibn al-Ḥuwayrith was a member of one such delegation, and he reports:

> We visited the Prophet (peace be upon him) and we were all young men of similar age. We stayed with him for twenty days. He then sensed that we missed our families, so he questioned us about our people whom we left behind. He was both caring and compassionate. He said to us: "Go back to your people and teach them, and explain to them their duties. Pray as you have seen me pray. When a prayer is due let one of you call the *adhān*, and let your eldest lead you in prayer." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and al-Nasā'ī.)

The reporter of this *ḥadīth* was a young man who visited the Prophet with some friends and stayed with him for twenty days. Since the members of this delegation were all young men, of similar age, and had learnt from the Prophet over the same period, they were equally qualified in their knowledge of Islam and the standard of their recitation of the Qur'ān. Therefore, the normal criteria for choosing the leader of prayer were not mentioned by the Prophet. These were: firstly, the best reciter of the Qur'ān and secondly, the person with greater knowledge of Islam. Since these young men were equally learned, the Prophet told them to apply a further criterion: age.

We note, in this *ḥadīth*, that the Prophet was keenly aware of the concerns of the delegation. Realizing that those young men must have left behind people who were close to them, he asked them about their families and friends. As

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The Treatment of Slaves

In pre-Islamic days, slaves in Arabia were treated in the same way as elsewhere: they had no rights and they were viewed as objects that a person might own. Their feelings were hardly ever considered, let alone cared for. However, the Prophet changed all that. He always stressed to his Companions that slaves should be treated with kindness. In fact, Islam makes it obligatory that slaves who want their freedom should be given a chance to buy themselves. It requires the Muslim community to help them to do so. Indeed, slaves are one of the eight classes of beneficiaries of *zakāt* money, which is used to help them buy their freedom.

One of the worst things that usually happened to slaves was the splitting of their families. The Prophet put an end to that and he changed the outlook to slavery altogether. According to the Prophet, a slave was a human being with feelings, emotions and sensitivities, like all other people. Hence, he asserted that slaves should not be treated differently, and that splitting their families apart was unacceptable. ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the Prophet's great-grandson, reports that:

> Abū Usayd al-Anṣārī brought some slaves from Bahrain. They stood in line. The Prophet stood up and looked at them. He noticed that a woman among them was crying. He asked her: "what makes you cry?" She said: "My son was sold in the tribe of Abs." The Prophet said to Abū Usayd: "You shall ride there and bring him home, for the same price you sold him for." Abū Usayd rode there and brought him.[12]

Clearly, the woman was in grief, because she felt that she might never see her son again. The Prophet understood her feeling and took the necessary action to reunite her with her son. He did not know the woman or her background, as she was a mere slave brought from a very distant place. Nevertheless, he would not accept that she should suffer for a bargain. Besides, he knew that slaves in the

[12] Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 9, p. 126

Muslim community stood a much better chance of regaining their freedom, as Islam abhorred slavery and used a different mechanism to allow for the freedom of slaves.

Kind to Animals

At the beginning of this chapter a Qur'ānic verse was quoted that declares that the Prophet's mission is a manifestation of God's grace to all the worlds. From this, a question arises about the animal world: What attitude did the Prophet have toward animals? The following *ḥadīth* provides an insight into this inquiry. Abū Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying:

> A man was walking along a desert route when he became extremely thirsty. He then found a well and he went down it to drink. When he came up, he found a dog panting heavily and licking the mud because of his thirst. He thought: "This dog is as thirsty as I was a little while ago." He went down the well again, took off his shoe, filled it with water and held it with his mouth as he came up. He then gave it to the dog to drink. God acknowledged his deed and forgave him his past sins. The Prophet's Companions asked: "Are we rewarded for a kindness to an animal?" He answered: "A good deed done to any living thing will earn reward from God." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

Forgiveness of sins is certain to ensure admittance to heaven. The man who gave the dog a drink did not think that his action would earn such a reward. The Prophet highlighted this, showing that a small kindness, even to an animal, should not be belittled. To Muslims, earning forgiveness through a kindness to a dog is even more surprising, because in Islam, dogs are treated as impure. Hence, Muslims generally avoid them unless the animal is needed for a purpose, such as a guard dog or a shepherd's dog.

As reflected in his teachings, the Prophet's compassion to animals was wide ranging. The Prophet made it clear that animals should not be ill-treated in any way. Muʿādh ibn Anas quotes the Prophet as saying: "Do not treat animals as chairs to sit on. A mount may be better in glorifying God than its rider." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim.) He asserts that using a donkey or a camel or any other animal as a chair to sit on for a while is wrong, as animals have not been created for such use. Rather, it is easier for such an animal to carry a person from one place to another, as load carrying is part of what they have been created for; whereas to sit still while someone is on its back is unnatural to

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Forgiveness of sins is certain to ensure admittance to heaven. The man who gave the dog a drink did not think that his action would earn such a reward. The Prophet highlighted this, showing that a small kindness, even to an animal, should not be belittled. To Muslims, earning forgiveness through a kindness to a dog is even more surprising, because in Islam, dogs are treated as impure. Hence, Muslims generally avoid them unless the animal is needed for a purpose, such as a guard dog or a shepherd's dog.

As reflected in his teachings, the Prophet's compassion to animals was wide ranging. The Prophet made it clear that animals should not be ill-treated in any way. Muʿādh ibn Anas quotes the Prophet as saying: "Do not treat animals as chairs to sit on. A mount may be better in glorifying God than its rider." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim.) He asserts that using a donkey or a camel or any other animal as a chair to sit on for a while is wrong, as animals have not been created for such use. Rather, it is easier for such an animal to carry a person from one place to another, as load carrying is part of what they have been created for; whereas to sit still while someone is on its back is unnatural to

any animal. The Prophet refers to animals as glorifying God. The Islamic view is that all creatures obey God and glorify Him in ways that we do not know. Another *ḥadīth* with similar import quotes the Prophet as saying: "Fear God in your treatment of animals as they cannot express what they feel. Ride them when they are fit, and take them for food when they are suitable." (Related by by Abū Dāwūd.)

The Prophet warned against the ill treatment of animals or tiring them without giving them enough to eat. ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaʿfar reports that he was with the Prophet when he entered a farm which belonged to a man from the Anṣār.

> As he entered, he saw a camel. The camel seemed to feel tenderness when he saw the Prophet and tears were in his eyes. The Prophet rubbed the camel's ears and he was quiet. The Prophet asked: "Who is the owner of this camel?" A young Anṣārī man said that it belonged to him. The Prophet said: "Won't you fear God in your treatment of this animal which God has placed in your hand? The camel complained to me that you keep him hungry and overwork him. (Related by Abū Dāwūd, al-Bayhaqī in *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, and al-Ḥākim.)

That the Prophet should understand the camel's complaint is not surprising. God might have made him understand it in any way He pleased. As he learnt this, he took the necessary action giving the owner a warning. He told him that such treatment of his camel is contrary to the conduct of God-fearing people, and therefore may lead to punishment in the Hereafter.

Even when animals are slaughtered for food, care should be exercised so as to make the process least painful to the animal. The Prophet said:

> God has ordained that every deed should be done well. Therefore, when you take a life, do it well. When you slaughter an animal, slaughter it well. Any of you who is doing that must sharpen his blade well and place the slaughtered animal comfortably. (Related by Muslim, Aḥmad, al-Nasāʾī and al-Tirmidhī.)

If such care must be taken of an animal at the point when he is to be slaughtered, what does that tell us about taking care of animals in normal life?

Compassion was the quality by which the Prophet was identified, and his compassion encompassed all worlds. Notably, the Prophet emphasized that women should always be treated with compassion and love.[13]

[13] I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 13.

CHAPTER 10

NOBILITY AT ITS BEST

ANAS IBN MĀLIK reports that a woman known to be mentally unstable said to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, I need your help in a certain matter." He said: "Choose any road and I will come to you and sort out what you need." He stopped with her at some road and discussed her need until she had finished her business. (Related by Muslim, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī in *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah*.)

The Prophet was seated with his Companions when this woman, who was known to be mentally unstable, told him that she needed his help. His immediate reaction was to keep her happy. He told her that he was ready to listen to her. At the same time, he respected her privacy, and did not ask her to discuss her problem in front of other people. He knew that a mentally disturbed person may attach much importance to things that people usually consider trivial, and he did not wish to embarrass her. He told her to choose a place where she would be comfortable to explain to him what she needed. Obviously, the place should be an open one, where they would be seen by people. Needless to say, there were no *cafés* or restaurants in Madinah at the time. Hence, anywhere in the street would do. The Prophet stopped with the woman and listened to her as she explained her need. He then gave her the help she needed.

This was typical of the Prophet, as he always attended to the weakest and most vulnerable in society. Anas reports: "Any young maid in Madinah would come to the Prophet and take him by the hand. He would not remove his hand from hers. She would take him anywhere she wanted."[1] (Related by Aḥmad and

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These are two among the numerous examples of how the Prophet treated the weakest elements in society. He wanted them to feel that he was always available to them and that he would help even the poorest or the weakest in anything they wanted. To him, everyone was important. If a girl needed his help, then that help was forthcoming. The second *ḥadīth* does not mention a particular maid. Rather, it suggests that this was the normal behaviour of the Prophet, and it appears from the wording of this *ḥadīth* that it was customary for maids to come to him for such help.

Meeting someone in authority may not be easy for some people, particularly those who are conscious of their weakness in society. The Prophet wanted to ensure that no one should feel apprehensive when meeting him. Although his position as God's Messenger was far more important than that of any king or head of state, he kept a cheerful disposition, so that anyone speaking to him could put their case clearly. Nevertheless, some people did not feel easy when speaking to him, and he tried hard to reassure them. Abū Masʿūd al-Badrī reports that a man was shaking hard when he spoke to the Prophet. The Prophet said to him: "Easy, easy! I am not a king. I am the son of a woman who used to eat dried and salted meat." (Related by Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim.) The Prophet gave the frightened man a graphic picture of the Prophet's own mother as an ordinary poor person who had to rely on the simplest type of food for her living. (People who could not afford meat all the time used to preserve what they could have by drying and salting it.)

When we look at the Prophet's actions in different situations, we must remember that God commands all Muslims in all generations to make him their role model. God says in the Qur'ān: "In God's Messenger you have a good model for everyone who looks with hope to God and the Last Day, and always

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The Prophet let everything he said or did be known: his life was an open book. Nothing that he did came into the open only after his death, as his Companions and people of his household told of everything that they saw or heard from him. Even his most private life was given in clear terms. People asked his wives about his behaviour at home and they mentioned everything. We learn, for example, that when he and one of his wives needed to take a bath, the two of them might do so together, using the same container. ʿĀ'ishah reports that she might take some water and pour it over her body, saying to him, "leave some for me," and he might say the same to her.[2] One or two of his other wives reported the same.[3] Reporting such private matters was necessary, so that Muslims would know what is permissible in such matters and what is not. As we have mentioned, the Prophet was not only a role model for his own generation; he remains a role model for all believers in Islam, wherever and whenever they live. This means that he combined the best universally acclaimed human traits. This could only be through an act of God, the Creator of all.

Modesty is a Virtue

A key aspect of the Prophet's character was his modesty. He was very decorous in manner and behaviour. He would not criticize people directly or embarrass them in public. ʿĀ'ishah reports: "If the Prophet heard that a certain person did or said something wrong, he would not say, 'this person says so and so', but he would say, 'How come that some people say so and so.'" (Related by Abū Dāwūd.)

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An example that combines both characteristics is his marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. Zaynab was his cousin, as her mother was Umaymah bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, his paternal aunt. As such, she belonged to a noble family. The Prophet had previously married her to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, whom he, long before his prophethood, had freed from slavery and adopted as a son. Islam, however, prohibited adoption and Zayd reverted to his old name. Both Zaynab and Zayd were unhappy with their marriage. God ordered the Prophet to let Zayd divorce her, and then to marry her himself. That was against the tradition of the Arabian society because of the earlier adoption of Zayd. However, the Prophet declared what God told him and recited the Qur'ānic verses that included remonstration for his hesitation in the matter. The wedding took place, and the Prophet invited several hundred people to a dinner on the occasion. After the dinner, all of them except for three left for home. The remaining three sat in the Prophet's home chatting. They were oblivious to the fact that they were causing inconvenience, and he felt too shy to give them any indication that they should leave. He went out himself, visiting his other wives, then returned only to find the three still chatting. He went out again, and then a third time. He was then told that they left and he went back to his bride. Thus, when it was a question of religion, and the changing of a well-established social tradition, he was outspoken, regardless of what that would cause him; on the other hand, when it was his own private matter, he was too shy to make his feelings clear.

Humility was an obvious characteristic of the Prophet. Perhaps nothing shows his humility better than the choice he was given by God at an early stage of his prophethood. Abū Hurayrah reports that:

> The Prophet was sitting with the angel Gabriel when he looked up into the sky and saw another angel descending. Gabriel said to the Prophet: "This is the first time this angel has ever come down since he was created." The angel said: "Muhammad, your Lord has sent me to give you a choice: shall He make you a king and a Prophet, or a servant of His and a Messenger?" Gabriel signalled him to be humble before his Lord. The Prophet said: "I prefer to be a servant of God and His Messenger." (Related by Aḥmad.)

That signal by the angel Gabriel gave the Prophet more than a hint about his position with God. It gave him an indication that God loves those who are self-effacing. Therefore, it was a characteristic of the Prophet for the rest of his

life. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reports: "I heard the Prophet when he said to us: 'Do not exaggerate my position like the Christians did with Jesus, son of Mary. I am only God's servant. Say of me: God's servant and Messenger.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

A similar *ḥadīth*, reported by Anas ibn Mālik, mentions that a man addressed the Prophet saying:

> "Muhammad, you are our master and son of our master. You are the best among us and the son of the our best." The Prophet spoke to the people present saying: "Maintain the fear of God and do not give way to Satan. I am Muhammad, son of ʿAbdullāh. I am God's servant and Messenger. By God, I do not like that you elevate me above the status God has given me." (Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.)

Human nature enjoys receiving praise. The Prophet, however, was keenly aware that exaggerated praise would elevate him above his status and, in consequence, ruin the role he was meant to play in human life. This role was not limited to his own generation: it applied to all generations, as he was to provide the role model for all Muslims. Those who exaggerated his status would ultimately stop following his lead, as they would think themselves too inferior to be able to do so. Thus, the purpose for which his life had been so meticulously documented will be lost. He was fully aware of this, and therefore he was keen to instil in his Companions the fact that he was an ordinary human being, except for the Divine message he received and delivered. He was also required to provide an example, both in his private life and in public.

One of the People

The Prophet's Companions realized the importance of following his example in everything. However, they could only learn what he did when he was with them. For this reason, whoever attended him reported on what he said or did. They appreciated the great change Islam brought into public life. However, they needed to know whether this would be mirrored by similar changes in their private lives. Several people asked his wives about his conduct at home. Al-Aswad said: "I asked ʿĀ'ishah what the Prophet did at home. She said: 'He attended to his family's needs. When it was time for prayer, he would attend the prayers.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī, Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī and al-Bayhaqī.) ʿĀ'ishah mentioned that she was asked what the Prophet did at home. She answered: "He used to repair his clothes, mend his shoes and do whatever men needed to do

he always stressed that he was God's Messenger, without any hesitation, and he made clear to all people what that entailed.

An example that combines both characteristics is his marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. Zaynab was his cousin, as her mother was Umaymah bint ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, his paternal aunt. As such, she belonged to a noble family. The Prophet had previously married her to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, whom he, long before his prophethood, had freed from slavery and adopted as a son. Islam, however, prohibited adoption and Zayd reverted to his old name. Both Zaynab and Zayd were unhappy with their marriage. God ordered the Prophet to let Zayd divorce her, and then to marry her himself. That was against the tradition of the Arabian society because of the earlier adoption of Zayd. However, the Prophet declared what God told him and recited the Qur'ānic verses that included remonstration for his hesitation in the matter. The wedding took place, and the Prophet invited several hundred people to a dinner on the occasion. After the dinner, all of them except for three left for home. The remaining three sat in the Prophet's home chatting. They were oblivious to the fact that they were causing inconvenience, and he felt too shy to give them any indication that they should leave. He went out himself, visiting his other wives, then returned only to find the three still chatting. He went out again, and then a third time. He was then told that they left and he went back to his bride. Thus, when it was a question of religion, and the changing of a well-established social tradition, he was outspoken, regardless of what that would cause him; on the other hand, when it was his own private matter, he was too shy to make his feelings clear.

Humility was an obvious characteristic of the Prophet. Perhaps nothing shows his humility better than the choice he was given by God at an early stage of his prophethood. Abū Hurayrah reports that:

> The Prophet was sitting with the angel Gabriel when he looked up into the sky and saw another angel descending. Gabriel said to the Prophet: "This is the first time this angel has ever come down since he was created." The angel said: "Muhammad, your Lord has sent me to give you a choice: shall He make you a king and a Prophet, or a servant of His and a Messenger?" Gabriel signalled him to be humble before his Lord. The Prophet said: "I prefer to be a servant of God and His Messenger." (Related by Aḥmad.)

That signal by the angel Gabriel gave the Prophet more than a hint about his position with God. It gave him an indication that God loves those who are self-effacing. Therefore, it was a characteristic of the Prophet for the rest of his

life. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb reports: "I heard the Prophet when he said to us: 'Do not exaggerate my position like the Christians did with Jesus, son of Mary. I am only God's servant. Say of me: God's servant and Messenger.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

A similar *ḥadīth*, reported by Anas ibn Mālik, mentions that a man addressed the Prophet saying:

> "Muhammad, you are our master and son of our master. You are the best among us and the son of the our best." The Prophet spoke to the people present saying: "Maintain the fear of God and do not give way to Satan. I am Muhammad, son of ʿAbdullāh. I am God's servant and Messenger. By God, I do not like that you elevate me above the status God has given me." (Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.)

Human nature enjoys receiving praise. The Prophet, however, was keenly aware that exaggerated praise would elevate him above his status and, in consequence, ruin the role he was meant to play in human life. This role was not limited to his own generation: it applied to all generations, as he was to provide the role model for all Muslims. Those who exaggerated his status would ultimately stop following his lead, as they would think themselves too inferior to be able to do so. Thus, the purpose for which his life had been so meticulously documented will be lost. He was fully aware of this, and therefore he was keen to instil in his Companions the fact that he was an ordinary human being, except for the Divine message he received and delivered. He was also required to provide an example, both in his private life and in public.

One of the People

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at home." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī.) To another person, who asked the same question ʿĀ'ishah replied: "He was an ordinary man, looking after his clothes, milking his sheep, and serving himself." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī.)

When he was with his Companions, he treated them all on equal footing. Abū Hurayrah and Abū Dharr report: "The Prophet used to sit among his Companions as one of them. A stranger may come and he would not know which one was God's Messenger. He would have to ask." (Related by al-Nasā'ī.) Indeed, several *aḥādīth* speak of people who had come from different parts of Arabia: when they entered the mosque, they would ask the people there, "Which of you is Muhammad?" Furthermore, almost everyone felt that they were very close to the Prophet. In his treatment of his Companions, the Prophet did not place them in classes or groups, as everyone was considered to be important. Abū Hurayrah reports:

> A black man – or perhaps a black woman – used to clean the mosque. Then he died, but the Prophet was not informed of his death. A few days later, the Prophet mentioned him, enquiring why he was absent. He was told that the man had died. He said: "Why have you not informed me?" They gave him some excuse, making it clear that they did not feel that was important. The Prophet said: "Show me his grave." He went to the cemetery and offered the prayer for the deceased. (Related by al-Bukhārī, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah.)

The Prophet accepted invitation from anyone who offered to share a meal with him, even if the food was very poor. Abū Hurayrah quotes him as saying: "If I am invited to a meal of just the end of a leg I will accept; and if the end of a shoulder is sent me as a gift I will accept." (Related by al-Bukhārī.) This acceptance was not limited to Muslims only, as Anas reports that "a Jew invited the Prophet to a meal consisting of barley bread and slightly rotting fat. He accepted." (Related by Ibn Saʿd.) His Companions realized that the Prophet had an easy nature. One of them tells us:

> The Prophet had qualities that were totally different from those of people who wielded power. He accepted the invitation of any person. He might find a date in the street, and he would pick it up and eat it, only worried that it might be a charity. He might ride an unsaddled donkey. (Related by Ibn Saʿd.)

The Prophet was very kind to the poor. He wanted them to feel that their poverty did not affect their standing in the Muslim community, and that it would not place them in any inferior position with God.

Generous to All

The Prophet was the most generous of people. He would give away whatever he had, even if he was in real need of it. All people at the time were aware of that, and they would go to him at any time with their requests and he would not turn anyone away. He would spend on others, leaving himself with nothing. Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh sums this up: "God's Messenger never said 'no' to any request by anyone." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Aḥmad.) Sahl ibn Saʿd reports that a woman brought the Prophet a garment, which she had embroidered. She said to him: "Messenger of God, I have decorated this garment with my own hand to make it a gift to you." The Prophet took it from her and thanked her. The reporter mentions that the Prophet was in need of it. He continues: "The Prophet came out to us making it his lower garment. A man among us touched it and said: "Messenger of God, give this to me to wear." The Prophet said: "Yes." He sat with us for some time then went away. He folded it and sent it to the man. Some people said to him: "You have not done well. You have asked him to give it to you knowing that he would not refuse anyone." The man said: "By God, I only wanted it so that it will be what I am wrapped with when I die." It was used for that purpose. (Related by al-Bukhārī, Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah and al-Bayhaqī).

This story shows the depth of faith they had. The man did not want the garment to wear, but to use it as his body wrapping when he died. It would serve as a witness to be submitted to God on the Day of Judgement testifying to his acceptance of Islam and following the Prophet. This also shows that all the Prophet's Companions were aware of the Prophet's generosity, which meant that he would not refuse any request. This was the reason for their remonstration with the man who wanted to take the garment when he realized that the Prophet was in need of it.

Indeed, there are numerous stories about the Prophet's generosity. These stories all tell of a man who was happier when he had given away everything he had. According to one report he once had ten dirhams[4] and he bought a shirt for four dirhams. He went out wearing it, but a man from the Anṣār put a

[4] The dirham was the unit of silver currency at the time. Each ten dirhams equalled a dinar, which was the gold unit of the currency.

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The Bravest of Men

Many of the Prophet's Companions have confirmed that he was the bravest among them. His Companions certainly included many brave people. For example, the Anṣār were renowned for their bravery. They had to be brave, as before Islam they fought many battles, against each other and against outside forces. In Madinah there were several Jewish tribes who made alliances with the two main Arab tribes there. Fighting flared up between them on various occasions. Yet, they all testified to the bravery of the Prophet. Anas ibn Mālik, who belonged to the Anṣār, reports:

> The Prophet was the best and bravest of people. One night the people of Madinah were awakened by a terrifying sound. They went out in the direction of the noise. They were soon met by the Prophet returning after he had ascertained the cause. He was riding an unsaddled horse that belonged to Abū Ṭalḥah, with his sword around his neck. He said to the people: "You have nothing to fear; you have nothing to fear." He then pointed to the horse and said: "It is a fine, fast horse." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, and Ibn Mājah.)

As noted in Chapter 2, in the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslim army suffered an initial setback that threw people in chaos, with many Muslims going in different directions. The Prophet and a few of his Companions remained steadfast. He told his uncle al-ʿAbbās, who had a loud voice, to call on the Anṣār. As soon as they heard him, they began to flock back to the Prophet. They had to fight very hard to resist the onslaught from the unbelievers, until they finally managed to reverse their advance. Referring to that difficult fight, al-Barā', who belonged to the Anṣār, said: "By God, when things were very hard against us, we were shielded by the Prophet. The bravest among us was the one who stood in line with him." (Related by Muslim.) ʿAlī, who was renowned for exceptional bravery, confirms this: "When the battle raged fiercely and fighters engaged one another, we were shielded by God's Messenger. No one would be closer than him to the enemy." (Related by al-Ḥākim, Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī.)

With a Sense of Humour

With a task that required him to deliver God's message in full to all mankind, and to establish a way of life that was entirely different from everything that was known throughout the world, the Prophet must have approached life in a very serious manner. Most certainly, he took a very serious view of his responsibility. He attended to it all hours of the day and night, making sure of treating all people with respect. He ensured that he was accessible to all. A pertinent question is whether, in view of such a heavy responsibility, the Prophet had any sense of humour. If so, what was it like? The answer is provided by early scholars who said: "The Prophet was held in awe by all people. He, therefore, sought to get people relaxed with a bit of fun." However, he never, seriously or in jest, said anything untrue. In one example, a man asked the Prophet to give him a mount as he needed to travel. The Prophet said to him: "I will give you an offspring of a she-camel." The man protested that it would be too weak for the purpose. The Prophet smiled and said: "Is not a strong camel an offspring of a she-camel?" (Related by al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd.)

A Bedouin named Ẓāhir used to come to Madinah and give the Prophet gifts from the desert area. When Ẓāhir left to go back home, the Prophet would give him what he needed for his journey. The Prophet said of him: "Ẓāhir is our desert brother and we are his urban people." Anas, who reports this *ḥadīth*, mentions that the Prophet liked Ẓāhir, who was ugly looking:

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> "Who is this? Leave me alone." He managed to look back and recognized the Prophet. He then did not mind that his back was to the breast of the Prophet. The Prophet said aloud: "Will anyone buy this slave?" Ẓāhir said: "Messenger of God, your merchandise is unsaleable." The Prophet said: "But in God's sight, you are precious." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī.)

Here it should be noted that although the Prophet referred to Ẓāhir as "slave", he used the Arabic word *ʿabd*, which also means "servant of God."

Coupled with a mild sense of humour that concentrated on saying only what was true, the Prophet had a cheerful face that welcomed all people. However, he did not laugh in a loud or hilarious manner. ʿĀ'ishah reports: "I never saw God's Messenger laughing in such a way that I could see the inside of his mouth. He only smiled." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī.) This description fits with his overall manner. Nevertheless, a smile on a cheerful face gives warmth and an air of friendliness. The Prophet often generated such an atmosphere among his Companions. Abū Dharr reports:

> I know the last person to be admitted into heaven and the last to leave hell. He is a man who is brought forward on the Day of Judgement. The angels are told to put before him his minor sins while his more serious ones are kept away. He is told: "On such and such a day you did this and that." He will admit to that, as he will not be able to deny anything. He is worried what would happen to him when his major sins are brought forward. At this point, he is told: "Instead of each of these sins, you are credited with a good deed." The man turns and says: "My Lord, I did other sins, but they are not being put before me." I saw a wide smile on the Prophet's face. (Related by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī.)

Unquestionable Loyalty

The Prophet was very loyal to old friends and relatives. It is well known that he loved his first wife, Khadījah, very dearly. He lived with her for twenty-five years. She was most supportive of his efforts when he became God's Messenger. Although polygamy was, at the time, the normal practice in Arabia (as indeed in most of the world) he did not marry another wife while she lived. Yet, his subsequent wives were jealous of her. ʿĀ'ishah reports:

> I was never more jealous of any woman than I was of Khadījah, although she died before the Prophet married me. This is because he often mentioned her and God told him to give her the happy news of having a fine home in heaven. The Prophet used to slaughter a sheep and send to her friends portions of its meat as gifts. (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

ʿĀ'ishah also reports that an elderly woman came to the Prophet when he was in my home. He asked her who she was. She said: "I am Jaththāmah, from Muznah." He said: "No, you are Ḥassānah, from Muznah. How are you? Are your people alright? How did you fare after you had left us?" She told him that she was well and praised God for that. When she left I asked him why he was so welcoming to such an old woman. He said: "She used to visit us when Khadījah was alive. To remain loyal to others is part of faith." (Related by al-Ḥākim.)

Acknowledging the claims of old acquaintances or relatives was characteristic of the Prophet, even for those with whom he had no contact for a very long time. The Battle against Hawāzin took place towards the end of the eighth year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, which means that he was sixty-one at the time. Yet, his loyalty to those with whom he had a relationship transcended the passage of time. After the battle a woman in her late sixties was taken to the Prophet. She said to him: "Messenger of God, I am your sister. I am Shaymā' bint al-Ḥārith." She was claiming this relationship on the grounds that her mother, Ḥalīmah, was the Prophet's wet nurse who breastfed him when young. It is well known that the Prophet stayed with Ḥalīmah until he was four years of age. When she said this, the Prophet said: "If that is the case, then you must have on you a mark which I caused you. The passage of time will not remove that mark." She revealed the upper part of her arm and said: "That is true, Messenger of God. I carried you when you were young and you bit me on my arm, causing this mark." The Prophet put his upper garment on the floor for her to sit on and said to her: "Whatever you request will be granted, and your intercession on behalf of anyone will be accepted."[5] He indeed offered her to stay with him, or to be returned to her people. She chose the latter, and he gave her generous gifts before she departed.

A Life of Poverty

The Prophet preferred a life of poverty. He could have had a very comfortable life and great wealth, but his preference was to go through life sharing the feelings of the poor. Abū Umāmah quotes the Prophet as saying:

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[5] Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 5, Cairo, 1988, pp. 199-200.

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> I know the last person to be admitted into heaven and the last to leave hell. He is a man who is brought forward on the Day of Judgement. The angels are told to put before him his minor sins while his more serious ones are kept away. He is told: "On such and such a day you did this and that." He will admit to that, as he will not be able to deny anything. He is worried what would happen to him when his major sins are brought forward. At this point, he is told: "Instead of each of these sins, you are credited with a good deed." The man turns and says: "My Lord, I did other sins, but they are not being put before me." I saw a wide smile on the Prophet's face. (Related by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī.)

Unquestionable Loyalty

The Prophet was very loyal to old friends and relatives. It is well known that he loved his first wife, Khadījah, very dearly. He lived with her for twenty-five years. She was most supportive of his efforts when he became God's Messenger. Although polygamy was, at the time, the normal practice in Arabia (as indeed in most of the world) he did not marry another wife while she lived. Yet, his subsequent wives were jealous of her. ʿĀ'ishah reports:

> I was never more jealous of any woman than I was of Khadījah, although she died before the Prophet married me. This is because he often mentioned her and God told him to give her the happy news of having a fine home in heaven. The Prophet used to slaughter a sheep and send to her friends portions of its meat as gifts. (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

ʿĀ'ishah also reports that an elderly woman came to the Prophet when he was in my home. He asked her who she was. She said: "I am Jaththāmah, from Muznah." He said: "No, you are Ḥassānah, from Muznah. How are you? Are your people alright? How did you fare after you had left us?" She told him that she was well and praised God for that. When she left I asked him why he was so welcoming to such an old woman. He said: "She used to visit us when Khadījah was alive. To remain loyal to others is part of faith." (Related by al-Ḥākim.)

Acknowledging the claims of old acquaintances or relatives was characteristic of the Prophet, even for those with whom he had no contact for a very long time. The Battle against Hawāzin took place towards the end of the eighth year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, which means that he was sixty-one at the time. Yet, his loyalty to those with whom he had a relationship transcended the passage of time. After the battle a woman in her late sixties was taken to the Prophet. She said to him: "Messenger of God, I am your sister. I am Shaymāʾ bint al-Ḥārith." She was claiming this relationship on the grounds that her mother, Ḥalīmah, was the Prophet's wet nurse who breastfed him when young. It is well known that the Prophet stayed with Ḥalīmah until he was four years of age. When she said this, the Prophet said: "If that is the case, then you must have on you a mark which I caused you. The passage of time will not remove that mark." She revealed the upper part of her arm and said: "That is true, Messenger of God. I carried you when you were young and you bit me on my arm, causing this mark." The Prophet put his upper garment on the floor for her to sit on and said to her: "Whatever you request will be granted, and your intercession on behalf of anyone will be accepted."[5] He indeed offered her to stay with him, or to be returned to her people. She chose the latter, and he gave her generous gifts before she departed.

A Life of Poverty

The Prophet preferred a life of poverty. He could have had a very comfortable life and great wealth, but his preference was to go through life sharing the feelings of the poor. Abū Umāmah quotes the Prophet as saying:

[5] Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 5, Cairo, 1988, pp. 199-200.

> God has offered me to make the plains of Makkah in gold for me. I said: "No, my Lord. I prefer to eat my fill one day and remain hungry another day. When I am hungry, I will glorify You and appeal to You for help; and when I eat, I would praise and thank You." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī.)

Such preference for poverty was much clearer during his time in Madinah. As discussed in Chapter 1, Muhammad earned his living first as a shepherd and then as an agent of Khadījah, attending to her business. When he married Khadījah, he led a comfortable life. It was after he immigrated to Madinah that he had practically nothing and lived the sort of life that meant eating well one day and going hungry another. Yet eating well was relative: a very simple meal was, to him, a luxury. ʿĀ'ishah reports: "Muhammad's family never had enough bread to eat for three consecutive nights from the time he arrived in Madinah until he passed away." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah.) She also reports: "Whenever Muhammad's family had two meals in one day, one of them must be dates." (Related by al-Bukhārī and al-Ḥākim.) Dates were the cheapest food in Madinah, and this was a staple diet for these people.

Much can be said about the Prophet's preference for a life of poverty. There are numerous reports that his preference was well thought out. For example, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb mentions that he once entered a room where the Prophet was reclining on a hard mat. As ʿUmar sat down he noticed that the Prophet had only a shirt on and that the mat had left its mark on his body:

> I looked around in the room and I saw in the cupboard a handful of barley that would hardly fill a man's cupped hands, and a handful of dying material. I also saw an undyed skin. Tears sprang to my eyes. He asked: "What makes you weep?" I said: "Messenger of God, how can I stop my tears when I see the marks this mat has left on your body, and your cupboard almost empty, while the emperors of Persia and Byzantium live in luxury. You are the one God has chosen to be His Messenger and you have nothing except what is in this cupboard." He said to me: "ʿUmar, will you not be happy to learn that they may have the luxury of this world while we have the happiness of the life to come?" I said: "I will, indeed." (Related by Muslim.)

This focus on what the future life will bring was indeed the key to the Prophet's view of the comforts and luxuries of the present life. He did his best

to impress the same view on his Companions and followers. Abū Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying:

> If I were to have a mountain of gold, I would love that within three nights I would have nothing left of it, provided there are people to take it, except something that I may keep to repay a debt I owe. (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

This attitude reflects his absolute trust in God. This is evidence of complete self-surrender to God, which is the very meaning of Islam. For the same reason, Muhammad used to avoid keeping any money with him overnight: if he received any money in the morning, he would have given it away by midday, and if he received it in the afternoon, he would give it away before he went to bed.[6] This attitude remained true of him until his last day. ʿĀ'ishah reports that just before his last illness, the Prophet left with her six or seven dinars, which he had instructed her to give away. However, his illness kept her preoccupied. When he appeared to improve he asked her about those dinars. She told him that his illness kept her busy and they were still with her. He asked to have them. When he had the money in his hand and said: "What does a Prophet think if he were to meet God and he has these with him?" (Related by Aḥmad.)

When we look at the way the Prophet and his family lived, characterized by the total lack of luxury and the cheerful acceptance of poverty, we must always remember that it was all a matter of choice. He could have had great wealth and a kingdom, but his preference was a mark of his self-surrender. However, there was another aspect to it: the Prophet was keenly aware of the status of his Companions and he wanted to share their feelings. If he had something, he wanted to share it with as many people as possible, because he wanted everyone to have what he had. Likewise, he never gave himself any preference over his Companions or members of his family. For example, ʿAlī was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law. He reports:

> One night we had nothing for dinner and we went to bed having had none. In the morning I went out. I later came back home to find Fāṭimah, my wife, looking sad. I asked her what caused her sorrow. She said: "We had no dinner last night and nothing to eat this morning. We have nothing for dinner." I went out again and managed to earn some money. I bought some meat and food for a dirham and took it to her. She

[6] Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, Beirut, (n.d.), vol. 6, p. 357.

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[7] Ibn Saʿd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, p. 186.

CHAPTER 11

A MOST CARING LEADER

ANAS IBN MĀLIK was young, maybe twelve or thirteen, or perhaps less, but he was bright. Unlike most children his age in Madinah at the time, he could read and write. Moreover, he was endowed with a good memory. His stepfather took him to the Prophet shortly after his arrival in Madinah, and said: "Anas is a good lad, Messenger of God. Allow him to be your servant." That was the beginning of a close association between Anas ibn Mālik and the Prophet, which lasted until the Prophet had passed away ten years later. Some visitors to Madinah remarked that they thought that Anas and his mother, Umm Sulaym, belonged to the Prophet's family, "because of the frequency of their entry of the Prophet's homes." People's treatment of their servants is a clear indication of their personality: people are inclined to behave naturally with a servant, fearing no reaction. This was particularly true in the Arabian society at the beginning of Islam. Weaker classes were invariably at the receiving end of ill-treatment and abuse, and this applied to slaves, servants, women and allies.[1] Yet, Anas ibn Mālik states that he experienced very different treatment in his service for the Prophet:

> I served him in town and during travel. By God, he never asked me about anything I did why I did it in the way I did; nor did he ever ask me about something I omitted why I did not do it. (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, and al-Tirmidhī.)

[1] Allies were individuals who attached themselves to tribes by a bond of loyalty called 'alliance'. They did not belong to the tribe by birth and they were detached from their own tribes for one reason or another. They were required to undertake all the duties that tribesmen undertook, but had fewer privileges. Some allies were former slaves who obtained their freedom and chose to remain with their former masters.

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A longer version of this *ḥadīth* adds the following words by Anas:

> I sincerely hope to meet him on the Day of Judgement and say to him, "I am your little servant, Messenger of God." I served him for ten years in Madinah when I was young and my manners were not the best to recommend me. He never made the slightest gesture of disapproval, nor did he ever say to me: "why have you done this or why have you omitted that." (Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.)

This is indicative of the Prophet's easy nature. It must be remembered, however, that Anas was a young teenager when he started his service of the Prophet, which is an age when many young ones feel rebellious, or at least unwilling to be told what to do. Anas hints at this in the second version, by saying "my manners were not the best to recommend me." So what did the Prophet do when his servant slackened? Anas reports:

> God's Messenger was of the best type of people. One day he sent me on an errand. I thought I would not go, but deep down I felt that I should go to fulfil what the Prophet told me. I went out and joined some boys playing in the street. Sometime later, the Prophet held me from the back. I turned to look at him and he was smiling. He said: "Unays,[2] have you gone to do what I told you?" I said: "Yes, Messenger of God; I will go now." (Related by Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.)

The Prophet apparently understood that Anas was not in the mood to fulfil an errand and he preferred to play with the boys in the street. He allowed him that for a while without adding any rebuke or harsh words. He merely held him from the back and smiled, with a question that served as a reminder.

This treatment was not because this servant was young; the Prophet demonstrated the best manners with all people at all times. When ʿĀ'ishah was asked about the Prophet's manners, her answer began with a question to her interlocutor: "Do you read the Qur'ān?" He answered in the affirmative. She said: "The Prophet's manners were the Qur'ān in practice." (Related by Muslim, Aḥmad and al-Nasā'ī.) The Qur'ān enjoins only what is good. Its orders, recommendations and prohibitions work in unison to bring out the best in man. Apparently, this question was asked of ʿĀ'ishah on several occasions.

[2] This form of his name is an endearment.

Sometimes she gave further details. Once, she read out the opening verses of *Sūrah* 23 ("The Believers"), which say:

> Truly, successful shall be the believers, who humble themselves in their prayer, who turn away from all that is frivolous, who are active in deeds of charity, who refrain from sex except with those joined to them in marriage, or those whom they rightfully possess – for then, they are free of all blame, whereas those who seek to go beyond that [limit] are indeed transgressors, who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, and who are diligent in their prayers. These shall be the heirs who will inherit the paradise; therein shall they abide. (23: 1-11)

She then added: "Such were God's Messenger's manners."

The Prophet provided the best example by treating people with respect and affection, regardless of their social status. Indeed, status did not count with him for anything. Everyone was important, and everyone was shown the same treatment. When anyone talked to him, he was full of attention. He would show him that he was keenly interested in whatever that person spoke to him about. Anas reports:

> When a person met the Prophet and shook hands with him, the Prophet would not take his hand away until that person has taken his hand away. Nor would he turn away from him until that person has turned to go his way. He was never seen to put his knees forward towards anyone sitting with him. (Related by al-Tirmidhī and al-Bayhaqī.)

The same applied when a person wanted to whisper something to the Prophet. Anas reports:

> I never saw the Prophet moving his head away when a man whispered to him until that man moved his head away. Nor did I see the Prophet releasing his hand from someone else's hand until the other person has released his. (Related by Abū Dāwūd and al-Bayhaqī.)

These reports confirm a characteristic of the Prophet, which was to give his full attention to whoever was talking to him or accompanying him. He would not give even the slightest hint that the other person should stop. Moreover, he would warmly welcome anyone who came to him. Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullāh reports: "God's Messenger never declined to see me ever since I embraced Islam.

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Whenever he saw me, he would smile." Every delegation that came to Madinah was given a warm welcome. Even those who had long been opposed to Islam, and had fought against it, would be welcomed if they came to see the Prophet with an open mind. If the visitor was one of the early Muslims, the Prophet's welcome would be even warmer. Abū Dharr was asked whether the Prophet shook hands with his Companions. He said:

> He shook hands with me every time I met him. One day he sent for me, but I was not at home. When I returned, I was told. So I went to him, and he was reclining on his bed. He hugged me. That was even better than a handshake. (Related by Abū Dāwūd.)

Perfection in Social Manners

When the Prophet met people, he enquired how they were. Anas reports: "When the Prophet met someone, he would ask how he was. If the man said that he was well and praised God, the Prophet would pray for him: 'May God keep you well.'" (Related by Aḥmad.) Similarly, if anyone was absent for three days, the Prophet would enquire about him. If he had gone away, the Prophet would pray for him; if he was at home, he would visit him, and if he was ill, he would also visit him. (Related by Abū Ya'lā.)

The Prophet enjoyed sitting with his Companions and listening to their conversation. He often did so after the dawn prayer, staying in the mosque until after sunrise. They might spend some of this time in ordinary conversation, remembering their pre-Islamic days and mentioning the change Islam brought into their lives. If they joked and laughed, he would join in with a cheerful smile.[3]

The Prophet's grandson, al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, asked his father to describe the Prophet's manners and actions in detail. A part of 'Alī's detailed answer concerned his behaviour when meeting people. 'Alī said:

> God's Messenger glorified God every time he sat down or rose to leave. He did not assign a particular place for himself, and indeed he advised against doing so. When he joined a group of people, he sat at the end of the group and encouraged others to do likewise. He gave everyone in the meeting their shares. Whoever sat with him thought that he was the

[3] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Masājid wa Mawādi' al-Ṣalāt* (Book on Mosques and Places of Prayer).

> closest to him. When anyone sat with him discussing a particular matter or explaining a need, the Prophet would stay with him until he left. If anyone asked him something, he gave it to him or he would at least say some kind words to him. His easy and friendly manners were extended to all. He became like a father to all his Companions. To him, they were all equal and had the same rights. Forbearance, modesty, perseverance and honesty were the characteristics of his meeting place. Voices were never raised there and no obscenities were ever uttered there. Slips were overlooked. People distinguished themselves only by their piety. They showed humility, respected the elderly and were compassionate to the young. They helped the one in need and took care of any stranger.

To another question on the Prophet's interaction with those attending him, 'Alī answered:

> God's Messenger was always cheerful, easy natured. He was neither hard nor harsh in his manners. He never used vulgar or obscene language, nor did he speak ill of anyone. He would overlook what he disliked. He did not make anyone lose hope or feel let down. He avoided three things: futile argument, excess and what was of no concern to him. He never attacked, shamed, or sought to find fault with anyone. He only said what he hoped to earn him God's reward. When he spoke, people were all attention. They would speak only when he stopped. They did not argue in his presence. They would listen to anyone who spoke until he had finished... He laughed at what made them laugh, and he wondered at what made them wonder. He was patient with any stranger encouraging him to put his case and ask his question. Indeed, his Companions were keen to bring those strangers to him. He would say: "If you see someone in need of something, help him." He accepted no praise except in return for something he had done. He never interrupted anyone but listened to what they had to say.

Al-Ḥusayn further asked about the time when the Prophet was silently thoughtful. 'Alī's answer pointed out that the Prophet's silence reflected one of four purposes: forbearance, caution, deliberation or contemplation. His deliberation was to consider what he heard from people, while he contemplated on what survived and what perished. He combined forbearance with patience, and as a result he was never angry or provoked. His caution was manifested in ways: he always chose the good and abandoned the bad, so that people would

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The Prophet enjoyed sitting with his Companions and listening to their conversation. He often did so after the dawn prayer, staying in the mosque until after sunrise. They might spend some of this time in ordinary conversation, remembering their pre-Islamic days and mentioning the change Islam brought into their lives. If they joked and laughed, he would join in with a cheerful smile.[3]

The Prophet's grandson, al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, asked his father to describe the Prophet's manners and actions in detail. A part of 'Alī's detailed answer concerned his behaviour when meeting people. 'Alī said:

> God's Messenger glorified God every time he sat down or rose to leave. He did not assign a particular place for himself, and indeed he advised against doing so. When he joined a group of people, he sat at the end of the group and encouraged others to do likewise. He gave everyone in the meeting their shares. Whoever sat with him thought that he was the

[3] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Masājid wa Mawādi' al-Ṣalāt* (Book on Mosques and Places of Prayer).

> closest to him. When anyone sat with him discussing a particular matter or explaining a need, the Prophet would stay with him until he left. If anyone asked him something, he gave it to him or he would at least say some kind words to him. His easy and friendly manners were extended to all. He became like a father to all his Companions. To him, they were all equal and had the same rights. Forbearance, modesty, perseverance and honesty were the characteristics of his meeting place. Voices were never raised there and no obscenities were ever uttered there. Slips were overlooked. People distinguished themselves only by their piety. They showed humility, respected the elderly and were compassionate to the young. They helped the one in need and took care of any stranger.

To another question on the Prophet's interaction with those attending him, 'Alī answered:

> God's Messenger was always cheerful, easy natured. He was neither hard nor harsh in his manners. He never used vulgar or obscene language, nor did he speak ill of anyone. He would overlook what he disliked. He did not make anyone lose hope or feel let down. He avoided three things: futile argument, excess and what was of no concern to him. He never attacked, shamed, or sought to find fault with anyone. He only said what he hoped to earn him God's reward. When he spoke, people were all attention. They would speak only when he stopped. They did not argue in his presence. They would listen to anyone who spoke until he had finished... He laughed at what made them laugh, and he wondered at what made them wonder. He was patient with any stranger encouraging him to put his case and ask his question. Indeed, his Companions were keen to bring those strangers to him. He would say: "If you see someone in need of something, help him." He accepted no praise except in return for something he had done. He never interrupted anyone but listened to what they had to say.

Al-Ḥusayn further asked about the time when the Prophet was silently thoughtful. 'Alī's answer pointed out that the Prophet's silence reflected one of four purposes: forbearance, caution, deliberation or contemplation. His deliberation was to consider what he heard from people, while he contemplated on what survived and what perished. He combined forbearance with patience, and as a result he was never angry or provoked. His caution was manifested in ways: he always chose the good and abandoned the bad, so that people would

follow his example; he always thought about what would benefit his community; and he always endeavoured to point out what would bring about the best in this life and in the life to come.[4]

Another point in the way the Prophet treated people was that he gave a special welcome to the dignitaries of other tribes and communities. Honouring such dignitaries was a natural attitude of the Prophet. However, he taught his Companions that this was related to good faith. By performing this in front of his Companions he stressed that these actions were not merely the fulfilment of good manners; they were the natural behaviour of all believers. For example, Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullāh, the chief of the Bajīlah tribe of Yemen, once came to the Prophet who was sitting with his Companions. No one moved to give Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullāh a place to sit, as everyone wanted to be as close to the Prophet as possible. The Prophet took off his upper garment and threw it to Jarīr. Jarīr took the Prophet's garment, put it at his face and neck, kissed it and rubbed his eyes with it. He said to the Prophet: "May God grant you of His favours as you have favoured me." He then put the garment on the Prophet's back. The Prophet said to his Companions: "Whoever believes in God and the Day of Judgement should honour a dignitary when he comes to see him."[5]

No Personal Grievance

The Prophet wanted to ensure that no one should have a personal grievance against him. If he inadvertently hit or knocked someone, he would offer that they retaliate. Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī reports that the Prophet was cutting something when a man came close to him. The Prophet accidently hit him with a stick he had in his hand, and caused a cut in the man's face. The Prophet said: "Come on, have your retaliation." The man said: "I forego it, Messenger of God." (Related by Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī and Abū Dāwūd.)

Some of the Prophet's Companions used such occasions to demonstrate their love of the Prophet who was dearer to them than their own children. Usayd ibn Ḥuḍayr of the Anṣār was a cheerful person with a good sense of humour. Once he was speaking to some people who were with the Prophet and made them laugh. The Prophet poked him in his side with his finger. Usayd said: "You have hurt me." The Prophet said: "Then take your turn and poke me." Usayd said: "You are wearing a shirt and I have none." The Prophet lifted his shirt to

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allow him to retaliate, but Usayd hugged him and kissed his side. He said: "This is indeed what I want." (Related by al-Bayhaqī.)

Closely related to this was the Prophet's keenness that people should entertain no doubt about his behaviour. If he was seen with a woman, he wanted people to know who the woman was. Ṣafiyyah, his wife, reported that during the time when the Prophet stayed the last ten days of Ramadan in the mosque, she came once to visit him. She spent some time talking to him in the mosque and then took her leave. He rose to take her home. As they were at the door of the mosque, two men from the Anṣār passed by. The Prophet said to them: "Wait a moment. This is Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy." They said: "All glory be to God, Messenger of God." They thought it was serious that the Prophet should point that out to them. The Prophet reassured them, saying: "Satan can get to people as one's own blood. I feared that some thoughts might come across your minds." (Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad, and Abū Dāwūd.)

Taking Care of Everyone

The Prophet wanted the best for all his Companions. The history of that period shows that many people had some strange names, and some of these had unfortunate meanings. A major tribe was known as the Kalb tribe, a name which meant "dog." Abū Sufyān, the chief of Makkah, had a son he named Ḥanẓalah which meant a bitter plant. The Prophet made clear to all Muslims that every child has the right to have a good name: it is the responsibility of the parents to choose good names for their children. When ʿAlī, who was married to the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah, had his first son he called him Ḥarb, which meant "war." The Prophet changed it to Ḥasan, which meant "good, appealing." ʿAlī then wanted to call his second son Ḥarb, but the Prophet named him Ḥusayn, which is an endearment form of Ḥasan. The Prophet went further than that and changed every negative name. ʿUmar had a daughter named ʿĀṣiyah, which meant "disobedient", but the Prophet renamed her Jamīlah, meaning "pretty." Similarly, God's Messenger once passed by a village called ʿAfrah, which meant "dusty", but he renamed it Khaḍirah meaning "full of greenery."

This was an aspect of the care the Prophet took of his Companions. A clear manifestation of such care can be seen in the Prophet's efforts to ensure that none of his Companions should be remembered after death for an unpaid debt. However, in the early years of his life in Madinah, the Muslim community was very poor and the state had no funds. Abū Hurayrah reports that a deceased person may be brought into the mosque for prayer before his burial. The Prophet would ask whether he had enough money to repay any outstanding

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debt. If he was told that there was enough for the purpose, he would lead the prayer for the deceased. If he was informed that was not the case, he would say to his people to pray for him themselves. Later, when he had plenty he used to say: "I am closer to the believers than their own selves. Whoever of them dies leaving an outstanding debt, I shall repay it. Whoever leaves property, it goes to his heirs." (Related in all six authentic *ḥadīth* collections.)

The question that arises here is why the Prophet would not offer the prayer for the deceased for a person who died before he could repay his debts, given that such a person is in greater need of the Prophet's prayers than most. The Prophet intended this to encourage relatives and tribesmen to come forward and undertake to repay the debts. This worked, as that was actually what happened. The deceased's relatives did not want their relative to be denied such prayer by the Prophet. Therefore, they came forward and undertook repayment. This responds directly to his main concern of the pursuit of right: the creditor had a rightful claim that should not be neglected. The Prophet made clear that as close relatives receive shares of inheritance when the deceased is well-off, they should also be generous when the deceased is underprivileged.

To the Prophet, debt was something that must be repaid as soon as possible. Therefore, he tried to help those of his Companions who were in debt. For example, a man from the Anṣār, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr ibn Ḥarām, was killed in the Battle of Uḥud. He had an outstanding debt in the form of a specific weight of dates. His son, Jābir, complained to the Prophet that the yield of their garden would not be sufficient and the creditor, a Jew, would not reschedule the debt. The Prophet ensured that the debt would be repaid on time.

The repayment of outstanding debts owed by individuals in the Muslim community was an aspect of the care the Prophet took of all his Companions, particularly those in a position of weakness. Whether weakness was due to social standing, ignorance or misjudgement, the Prophet sought to rectify errors, to provide simple instructions and to enhance the status of all his Companions. Anas ibn Mālik reports:

> We were with God's Messenger in the mosque when a Bedouin came over. He then stood up and began to urinate in the mosque. The Prophet's Companions told him to stop. The Prophet said: "Leave him alone. Do not stop him." They let him finish urination. The Prophet then called him over and said to him: "Mosques are not places where people may urinate or throw their garbage. They are places where people spend time glorifying God, offering prayers and read the Qur'ān." He then gave instructions to a man who brought a bucket of water and he poured it over the place where the Bedouin had urinated. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

It goes without saying that a place of worship should not be used as a toilet. Specifically, the Prophet's mosque hardly had any mats or carpets, and the people prayed on the hard floor. As Bedouins lived mostly in tents in the desert, that Bedouin could be forgiven if he thought that he could urinate there. He was, perhaps, unaware of the Islamic standards of cleanliness and purification. The Prophet's Companions were shocked by his action, but the Prophet wanted first that the Bedouin did not come to any harm. He then gave him the right advice, pointing out why his action was wrong. He then rectified the matter by purifying the place.

Another example concerns ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbd Nuhm, who was a young lad from the Muzaynah tribe (which lived at some distance from Madinah). His rich uncle took care of him after his father's death and guided him on the way to financial success. ʿAbdullāh learnt about Islam and wanted to become a Muslim, but his uncle was opposed to it. Therefore, he delayed taking such a step, hoping that his uncle would have a change of heart. Years passed, but his uncle showed no sign of changing his opinions, so early in the ninth year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah ʿAbdullāh decided that he could no longer wait for his uncle. ʿAbdullāh respected his uncle, so he did not want to take this major step without informing him. Abdullāh told his uncle that he had been waiting for him so that he would join him in becoming Muslim. His uncle was furious, and told ʿAbdullāh that if he became a Muslim, he would take everything away from him and leave him penniless. ʿAbdullāh said that he cared nothing for material things and would go ahead and join the Prophet. His uncle did as he threatened, taking everything from him, including his clothes: he left him with only his underwear. ʿAbdullāh's mother gave him a rug to cover himself with. He cut it into two, wrapping himself with one from the waist down, and putting the other over his shoulders. He then went to Madinah, met the Prophet and accepted Islam.

His original name was ʿAbd al-ʿUzza. The Prophet changed it to ʿAbdullāh and nicknamed him Dhul-Bijādayn, meaning "the man with two rugs." The Prophet took care of him and taught him the Qur'ān. ʿAbdullāh memorized a good part of the Qur'ān and often read aloud in the mosque. Some people complained to the Prophet. They felt that raising one's voice too high was contrary to a respectful approach to the Qur'ān, and it could disturb other people's concentration. The Prophet, however, told them to leave ʿAbdullāh alone; adding that the young man willingly forsook his home for God's sake.

ʿAbdullāh Dhul-Bijādayn joined the Muslim army in the Expedition of Tabūk. He wanted the Prophet to pray that he would be a martyr. However, the Prophet instead prayed that no unbeliever should shed his blood. He informed him that a person on a campaign of jihad will be a martyr even if he dies of illness during the campaign. That was what happened to him: he died of fever on the way back. ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd reports that he was present at the burial, which took place at night, with the Prophet down in the grave while Abū Bakr and ʿUmar held his body and lowered him to hand him over to the Prophet who prayed for him saying: "My Lord, I am most pleased with him; so be pleased with him." Ibn Masʿūd commented: "I wish I was the one being buried in that grave."[6] This expedition took place in year 9 AH (the ninth year of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah), which means that Dhul-Bijādayn was a Muslim for less than one year when he died.

When Good People Err

The Prophet's ability to deal with the grave slips made by his Companions was a mark of the Prophet's character. He realized that people may weaken in the face of temptation, or when encountering the threat of danger to themselves or to their close relatives. When such weakness leads someone to communicate with the enemy at critical moments, this may have serious consequences. This was the case of Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Baltaʿah. The Quraysh was the leading Arabian tribe. The Prophet belonged to it, but most of its people stood firmly against Islam and forced the Prophet and the Muslims to immigrate to Madinah. After that they tried to suppress Islam by force, leading several armies to fight the Muslim community. They were largely unsuccessful. Eventually they signed a peace agreement with the Prophet, which was meant to last for ten years. Less than two years into that period, the Quraysh blatantly violated this agreement, fighting against a tribe that was in alliance with the Prophet. The Prophet decided to take action against the Quraysh, ordering mobilization and taking every measure to keep his preparations and intentions secret. He wanted the Quraysh to suddenly encounter the increasing might of the Muslim community, so that a peaceful end for a long drawn-out conflict could be achieved. Although he needed to be ready to fight if circumstances forced a battle, his aim was that in such an eventuality, he would achieve a quick victory with minimum bloodshed.

Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Baltaʿah was one of the early Companions of the Prophet, and had immigrated with him to Madinah. He fought in every battle that involved

[6] Abū Nuʿaym al-Aṣbahānī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 2, Damascus, 1970, p. 673.

the Muslims after they had established their city-state in Madinah. Yet, at this juncture some weakness crept into him. He feared for his relatives in Makkah, who were vulnerable to a retaliatory action by the Quraysh, even though they were not Muslims. He wanted to protect them by doing the Quraysh a favour, and so he wrote a letter informing them of the Prophet's intentions. However, the letter was retrieved and Ḥāṭib's action was exposed. Voices were raised demanding his execution because his was an act of treason. Any court, anywhere in the world, would have found him guilty of high treason in passing key military secrets to the enemy.

However, the Prophet calmed down all the agitation. He questioned Ḥāṭib about his motives, and Ḥāṭib explained:

> I am certainly a believer in God and His Messenger. I have not changed at all. It is not that I have any doubts in matters of faith. I only looked at my situation in Makkah, where I have a family and children. I was only an ally to the Quraysh, not being born among them. Other people among the Muhājirūn who have families or property in Makkah have their relatives and clans to protect them. I only thought that if I did the Quraysh a favour by warning them, they would return it by protecting my children and family. There is nothing more to it than that. I would never revert to unbelief after God has guided me to the right faith.[7]

The Prophet accepted Ḥāṭib's explanation and apology, reminded his Companions of Ḥāṭib's past service to Islam and told them not to judge him in any negative light. His forgiveness of Ḥāṭib's action was complete.[8]

Personal Care

On many occasions the Prophet showed special interest in the personal affairs of his Companions. He enquired after them and provided advice, and he also helped them to sort out their personal problems. For example, Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh was a young man (around twenty years old) when the Prophet arrived in Madinah. He was close to the Prophet. While the Muslim army was on the way back from an expedition, Jābir was riding with the Prophet and he replied to a question from the Prophet, saying that he had been newly married shortly

[7] Related by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, (Book on the Expeditions). See also Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 16.

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before the expedition. The Prophet asked him about his wife, and whether she was a young virgin or a mature woman. Jābir told him that she was the latter:

> The Prophet said: "Would it not have been better if you had married a young virgin with whom you can play and have fun?" Jābir said: "Messenger of God, my father was recently killed at Uḥud, leaving me my seven sisters to look after. I therefore married a woman who could look after them and keep the family together." The Prophet replied, "Then you have done the right thing, God willing. When we arrive at Ṣirār, we will have some camels slaughtered and we will celebrate. Your wife will then hear that we have celebrated her marriage and she will put up her cushions."[9] Jābir said: "But we have no cushions, Messenger of God." The Prophet said, "But you will have. When you arrive at Madinah you should arrange a good feast." When the Muslim army arrived at Ṣirār, which was only about five kilometres from Madinah, the Prophet had a number of camels slaughtered and cooked. The whole army shared in the celebration of the recent wedding of one of its soldiers.[10]

Numerous reports show how the Prophet took interest in the personal affairs of his Companions. He would help everyone, regardless of his or her position or social standing. One of the Prophet's servants was Rabīʿah ibn Kaʿb al-Aslamī. He was very diligent in his service, staying up late and attending to anything the Prophet needed. The Prophet suggested that he should get married, but Rabīʿah preferred to stay single so that he could be free to serve the Prophet. When the Prophet repeated this suggestion several times, Rabīʿah thought that it behoved him to not decline again. However, he had no money. He told this to the Prophet, who sent him to a certain clan of the Anṣār to give them the Prophet's message that they should give him the woman he named as a wife. They agreed without hesitation. The Prophet then told some of his Companions to collect a dowry for Rabīʿah and to get him a sheep to slaughter and cook. He then procured him all the barley that the Prophet had at home to bake some bread. He invited a number of people to celebrate the marriage.[11]

Rabīʿah was a model servant of the Prophet. He always remained in attendance until he was certain that the Prophet had gone to sleep. He was ready to do whatever the Prophet asked him to do. In appreciation, the Prophet once said

[9] Putting up cushions was apparently a sign of celebrating a happy occasion.

[10] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, (Book on Jihad); see also Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 217; and al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 3, p. 383

[11] The story is given in full detail by Imām Aḥmad in his *Al-Musnad*.

to him: "I will give you whatever you ask." Rabīʿah was thrilled, but he wanted a good prize, knowing that the Prophet always honoured his promises. He, therefore, requested some time to think. He later came to the Prophet and said: "My request is that I be in your company in heaven." The Prophet asked him: "Who gave you this advice?" Rabīʿah said: "By Him who sent you with the message of the truth, no one gave me any advice. I only thought of your position close to God Almighty and I remembered that this life is short and whatever God has assigned me is certain to come. Therefore, I decided to make my request for my future life." The Prophet was silent for a long while. He then said to Rabīʿah: "I will certainly pray for you, but I would like you to help me against yourself by often prostrating yourself in prayer."[12]

We do not see here anything that resembles the relation between master and servant: instead, we see a respect that has little to do with social status. There is no suggestion that a servant should set his or her aspirations lower than the highest place in heaven. We see the advice that would guarantee the fulfilment of the request. Nothing is more precious than being in the company of God's Messenger in heaven. Therefore, hard work should be put into it. Prostration in prayer is the epitome of self-surrender to God. Keeping this within sight all the time is certain to keep a person on the right track: hence the Prophet's advice to Rabīʿah.

Dearer than Oneself

How did the Prophet's Companions reciprocate his fine treatment? To say that he was dearer to them than everything on earth is an understatement. In fact, they loved him more than they loved themselves. They realized that his actions were the mark of a true believer. For one thing, they appreciated the kindness he showed them at every turn. They could not hope for better treatment by anyone, and they realized that their welfare was paramount in his thoughts. Indeed, he loved all humankind and was overjoyed when anyone recognized the truth of God's Oneness and believed in Him: that was his hope for all people. For this reason, he was most kind to those who came forward and declared their belief in the face of opposition by their tribal chiefs and hostile forces. He wanted to protect them and lead them to what is best.

The Prophet's Companions were also keenly aware of the great transformation that had taken place in their lives after having accepted the truth of the Islamic

[12] This *ḥadīth* is related by Muslim in a shorter version, and by Aḥmad in a slightly different wording in relating Rabīʿah's request.

before the expedition. The Prophet asked him about his wife, and whether she was a young virgin or a mature woman. Jābir told him that she was the latter:

> The Prophet said: "Would it not have been better if you had married a young virgin with whom you can play and have fun?" Jābir said: "Messenger of God, my father was recently killed at Uḥud, leaving me my seven sisters to look after. I therefore married a woman who could look after them and keep the family together." The Prophet replied, "Then you have done the right thing, God willing. When we arrive at Ṣirār, we will have some camels slaughtered and we will celebrate. Your wife will then hear that we have celebrated her marriage and she will put up her cushions."[9] Jābir said: "But we have no cushions, Messenger of God." The Prophet said, "But you will have. When you arrive at Madinah you should arrange a good feast." When the Muslim army arrived at Ṣirār, which was only about five kilometres from Madinah, the Prophet had a number of camels slaughtered and cooked. The whole army shared in the celebration of the recent wedding of one of its soldiers.[10]

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message. They compared their present life with their old ways, when they worshipped those statues they made with their own hands. They felt ashamed of their past and grateful for their present. Their old, dull and arbitrary traditions made no sense; while their present belief in God's Oneness elevated them to a higher level that is worthy of man. Their sense of gratitude to Muhammad, as the Prophet who delivered God's message, was infinite. Hence, they were always ready to lay down their lives to defend him. When the Quraysh tried to kill the Prophet, some of his Companions shielded him with their own bodies, while others fought hard, despite receiving multiple injuries, to defend him.

Later generations of Muslims cannot do such actions, as the Prophet does not live in their midst. However, they share in the same degree of gratitude to the man who delivered God's final message that is certain to bring happiness into human life. The world is a much better place for the fact that Islam guides the life of a large section of mankind.

CHAPTER 12

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

THE PROPHET PASSED AWAY twenty-three years after the day he was informed that God had chosen him to be His last Messenger to mankind. Those twenty-three years witnessed the gradual revelation of the Qur'ān, which embodies the Divine message that constitutes the Islamic faith. During this period, a most radical transformation took place in the Arabian society, and this change had a bearing on the world at large.

Arabian society at the time of Muhammad was tribal, with a strict hierarchy. Tribes were scattered all over Arabia. Some tribes were small and lowly, while others were large and highly respected. Status was not merely based on the size of a tribe however: this was also influenced by factors such as a tribe's history and past glories in war or peace, its relations with neighbours and the people who came out of its ranks to become famous. The Quraysh was the top tribe in Arabia. They lived in Makkah and were the custodians of its Grand Mosque, the Ḥaram. At the centre of Makkah was the Ka'bah, the first building ever consecrated for the worship of God alone. The Quraysh derived much pride and honour from looking after the Mosque and its visitors. Pilgrims came to Makkah from all over Arabia, and they recognized the importance of the Ḥaram (or "the House", as it was often called). They also honoured the Quraysh for their custodianship and were ready to acknowledge the authority of this tribe, particularly in matters of religion.

A major tribe like the Quraysh consisted of several clans, and a clan could become large enough to be a tribe in its own right. Some of the Quraysh clans were proper candidates for that status, but they preferred to remain part of the Quraysh, given the status it was afforded. However, the clans were rivals

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for honour and distinction. Makkah had no agriculture, so its people relied on foreign trade, and organized two major annual trips to Syria and Yemen for their living. As the Quraysh were skilful businessmen, Makkah became a wealthy city, and its people led a comfortable and lazy life. They did not do manual work, relying instead on their slaves and servants to attend to such tasks. They had large numbers of slaves and allies. The latter were individuals who did not belong to the tribe but were attached to it: without such an attachment, any individual who did not belong to a tribe was always vulnerable to attack.

Pride was a common characteristic of the Arabs at the time, and they took pride in their ancestry, tribe and race. The poetry of the time was usually full of praise for the poet's family and tribe. The rivalry between tribes fuelled literary competition, with poets using their talent to maximum advantage in praising their communities. The emergence of a poet in a tribe called for great celebration, because a good poet would be able to put the tribe in a prominent place on the map and may be able to undermine the positions of its rivals. In fact, the role played by poets in society can be compared to that of mass media in our time. Rivalry between tribes was not always limited to boastful poetry, however: it often flared up into armed raids that might have no reason other than winning some booty, particularly when times were hard. A raid often called for another retaliatory one from the tribe that was attacked. This would lead to a series of raids and wars that could last for a long time.

The wealth that was accumulated by the Quraysh, and other major tribes, led to a life of many vices. Drinking and gambling were commonplace, as was sexual immorality. Moreover, injustice was common, particularly when the perpetrator, whether an individual or a tribe, felt that they could get away with it. For example, it was not uncommon for a wealthy and powerful businessman to refuse to pay someone their dues, because there was no authority to enforce justice. Slaves and the weaker elements of society were particularly vulnerable to such injustice. In fact, a master could kill his slave without fearing to be held to account for the crime.

Yet, the Arabian society also had its virtues. Prominent among these were bravery, generosity, hospitality to guests and the preservation of honour. These were values that all Arabs respected and valued. The fact that such values were recognized and adhered to led to some contradictions in behaviour. To give an example, justice was always highly praised, yet injustice was quite common. Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, a famous Arab poet of the time, whose poetry is still studied in schools and universities throughout the Arab world, says: "The one who does not deal unjustly is certain to suffer injustice." By contrast, the Quraysh clans made a covenant to support anyone suffering injustice in their midst.

The message of Islam was revealed into this society: it was meant to produce a total change in human life, and it started with transforming the Arabian society. From the outset, Islam declared that it was a message for all mankind. As such, the Prophet treated all people as equals, ensuring that no one was to be ignored in the efforts of advocating the new message on account of their social status, race, colour or gender. Furthermore, the Prophet made it clear to all new Muslims that they were brothers and sisters in faith. In the early years of Islam in Makkah, the Prophet established a bond of brotherhood between the Muslims, and as he appointed one of them to be the brother of another, he did not look at their tribes or clans or wealth or whether they were free men or slaves. Rather, they were treated as a single community united by the bond of faith. To instil the concept even further, the Prophet told them that those generations of believers in former Divine religions, from the time of Adam to the present day, were their brethren. He always referred to past Prophets as his own brothers, and would say: "May God have mercy on my brother Moses" (or Noah, or the Prophet who was mentioned). When the Muslims of Makkah had to immigrate to Madinah, they were welcomed by their brethren there, who accommodated them in their homes and shared everything with them. The Prophet, however, went further than that and told them that everyone from Madinah (i.e. the Anṣār) should have a brother from the Muhājirūn (i.e. the immigrants from Makkah).

Bond of Brotherhood

The Muslims took this bond of brotherhood very seriously. One example of this is provided by Saʿd ibn al-Rabīʿ and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, who were made brothers by God's Messenger. Saʿd, an Anṣārī, said to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān who came from Makkah: "I am well off and I will give you half my property. I also have two wives. Choose one of them and I will divorce her so that you may marry her when her waiting period is over." ʿAbd al-Raḥmān thanked him and said: "May God bless you, your family and your property. I do not need any of this. Just guide me to the market place and I will try to fend for myself." He was a man with a good eye for business. Within a few days he made some money. A short while later he got married.[1] Needless to say, both were magnanimous in their approach. This was characteristic of the community established by the Prophet.

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[1] The *ḥadīth* is related in full by al-Bukhārī in several places. It is also in al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, Aḥmad and al-Ḥākim.

The Prophet abolished the class system that had operated within the tribal order. Shortly before the people of Madinah came to know about Islam, they were weakened by a ferocious war between the two main Arab tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj. The Prophet put an end to that and replaced their rivalry by the bond of faith. They started to refer to each other as brothers. Indeed, the Muslim population of Madinah, comprising people from both the Aws and the Khazraj, as well as the Muhājirūn who came from Makkah, formed a single community. This was stated in the covenant of Madinah, which was the first written constitution in human history. The covenant organized relations with other communities, including the Jews and the unbelievers of Madinah. In this new community, there was a single class to which all Muslims belonged.

The Prophet did not try to establish a new social order by force. He realized that to force a social change by sheer power was not the proper way to eradicate the social injustices that were prevalent in many societies. Instead, he brought about a change of mentality, wherein people started to question old norms and evaluate them in the light of the Qur'ān. Whatever was inconsistent with the Qur'ān was discarded, and what agreed with it strengthened. He did not make a decree abolishing slavery, but he made the freeing of a slave from bondage one of the best-rewarded actions a Muslim could do. Islam also makes the freeing of a slave the punishment for many types of violation of Islamic law. Furthermore, the Prophet instilled in his Companions the notion that slaves were their brethren in faith. Once, two of his Companions had a serious disagreement. One of them, Bilāl, was a former slave of Abyssinian origin. In the heat of argument, the other, Abū Dharr, called him "son of an Abyssinian woman." When the Prophet heard of this, he was angry. He said to Abū Dharr: "Are you trying to humiliate him on account of his mother? You are a man harbouring traces of *jāhiliyyah*." (*Jāhiliyyah* is the Islamic term that refers to a social order that is contrary to the principles of the Divine faith: it stems from a root *jahala*, which means ignorance). Abū Dharr was very upset. He realized his mistake and apologized to Bilāl, ensuring that the whole matter was put to an end. Abū Bakr, the Prophet's closest Companion, had bought Bilāl and set him free. In reference to this, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: "Abū Bakr is our master and he set free our master." Thus the former slave was referred to by the second Caliph as "our master."

Looking Beyond this Life

The pre-Islamic Arabian society had moved away from the Divine religion of Abraham and Ishmael, their forefathers, who had established the Divine faith

in Arabia. This departure from a faith that was based on God's Oneness took place over a long period of time. In the days of the Prophet's youth, idolatry had become commonplace in Arabia. The Arabs worshipped many deities, and these were represented by statues made of stone, mud, gold or brass. They even made idols with dates: they worshipped these, but if they were hungry they could eat them. An even greater absurdity was the belief of some Arabs that God married the jinn and begot the angels who were God's daughters through that marriage. This absurdity is compounded by the fact that many Arab men ill-treated women and considered them to be inferior to men.

Along with all this, the Arabs totally forgot about the life to come, such that the thought of resurrection after death became inconceivable to them. Hence, they only thought of enjoying life while they were in this world. This is common to all people who deny resurrection and the inevitability of a day of reckoning and judgement, as they are keen to get as much of this life as possible. As a result, whatever they can gain in their life on earth is to be taken, even though it may be against the law or against moral values. Such people would not hesitate to break the law for some gain, disregard honourable practice, trample over the right of others or commit any offence, if they felt they could get away with it.

The Arabs were not alone in this, as all people who deny the resurrection and accountability to God will be prone to seek any gain or pleasure, even by illegitimate means. Although some will acquire a sense of integrity and honour through upbringing, education and interaction in society, this will often weaken when the temptation is strong.

Advocating his message, the Prophet worked hard to drive home to people the point that this life is not an end by itself, rather, it is a prelude to something much bigger and better for those who follow the right path, which begins with the belief in God's Oneness and a second life after death. The Arabs of pre-Islamic days maintained: "There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die, we live, nothing but time destroys us." (45: 24) The Prophet assured them: "You shall most certainly die like you go to sleep, and you shall most certainly be resurrected like you wake up." The resurrection means the Day of Judgement, when everyone will have to account for what they do in this life. They will be rewarded according to their deeds, and God will judge them in absolute fairness. No one will be favoured and no one will be given less than they deserve. God, however, is compassionate and merciful, and He will bestow mercy on those whom He considers worthy.

This concept has a substantial bearing on people's outlook and behaviour. When people realize that all their actions are recorded, and their intentions are known, they want to work for the better outcome. They are told that they have

freedom of choice while they live on earth. Such freedom means responsibility and accountability, and this gives human life a purpose worthy of man whom God has distinguished from the rest of His creation by granting him the freedom of choice.

Whereas previously people had looked only at this life, and tried to make the best of it as they went through it, the Prophet's message gave them a much wider horizon. Limiting their vision to this world, they would compete for the limited resources the earth provides. Looking at the Hereafter helped them aspire to a much richer and happier life, one that is everlasting. It was no wonder, then, that those who responded to the Prophet's call felt that they made a great leap forward and achieved a total change in their lives. They would not give up their new perspective for anything in the world.

Many of those who opposed the Prophet voiced the narrow view that others, who commanded higher authority among their people, were more qualified to receive God's message than Muhammad (peace be upon him). In this, they echoed unbelievers of old, who opposed earlier Prophets and Messengers, claiming that their positions in society did not qualify them for that status. In Arabia, the cry was: "Why was not this Qur'ān revealed to some great man of the two cities?" (43: 31) The two cities were Makkah and Taif. To such people, a great man meant someone with wealth and authority. Unbelievers often claim that their wealth is a mark of their own distinction. In response to this, the Qur'ān cites a dialogue between a believer and a wealthy unbeliever. At some point, the unbeliever says to his friend: "Nor do I think that the Last Hour will ever come. But even if [it does and] I am brought before my Lord, I should surely find there something better than this in exchange." (18: 36) Several people in Makkah told the Prophet that if what he claimed of resurrection and accountability were true, they stood to have the best outcome because they were rich and powerful. They could not imagine that their wealth and power were a test, as Islam preaches.

Justice for All

Thus, Arabian society during the advent of Islam was rife with injustice, despite the fact that fairness was accepted as one of the higher values that people should enshrine. The Prophet oversaw the establishment of a society in which justice is a supreme value. Numerous are the Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* statements that insist on dealing justly with all people, including enemies, in all situations. The Qur'ān gives an order by God that stands for all time: "Believers! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though

it be against yourselves, or your parents and kin." (4: 135) The Prophet made it clear that if anyone is awarded something unfairly and knows it to be unfair, they are accountable for such injustice. He warned his Companions when they put their disputes to him, reminding them that he was only human: "some of you may be able to present a better case and I rule in their favour. If I give anyone something that belongs to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of fire. He may take it or leave it."

This strong emphasis on fairness and justice became deeply rooted in the Muslim community, to the extent that Abū Bakr, who succeeded the Prophet as a ruler of the Muslim state, said in his inauguration speech: "A weak person is strong in my sight until I have given him what rightfully belongs to him, and a powerful person is weak until I have taken from him what rightfully belongs to others."

The Prophet, in addition to explaining the message of Islam and calling on people to believe in it, sought to show how it should be implemented. His statement above (about winning something unfairly by the support of a court of law) makes every individual the final arbiter with regard to what is fair. Some may be able to submit a strong case, supported by documents and evidence, and the Prophet or any judge may rule in their favour on the basis of the evidence provided. However, if deep down such people are aware that what was obtained through that ruling does not rightly belong to them, they are actually offered a spark of fire in their hands. The Prophet tells that such people have the choice of taking it and being burnt, or leaving it and saving themselves. Thus, the Prophet recruits people's consciences and their sense of faith in support of absolute justice.

However, the Prophet realized that this is not enough. The voice of their conscience may not be loud enough to ensure that people can resist the strong temptation of an easy gain, especially when this has the backing of a legal ruling. Therefore, he emphasized the Islamic principle of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong." This principle works at both the individual and community levels, and states that wherever there is something wrong, people should speak out against it in order to ensure fairness, justice and virtue. The Prophet sought to mobilize everyone's sense of faith in putting this principle in practice. He said: "Whoever sees some wrong being committed should change it by action. If he cannot, then by word of mouth. If he still cannot, then by denouncing it in his heart. This last one is the weakest type of belief." (Related by Muslim.) This principle works in all strata of society and in all areas of behaviour. Whatever is wrong should be denounced and changed. When this cannot be done, and there are many situations where this is the case, then the

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least a believer can do is to feel a strong dislike towards the situation and to desire for it to be changed.

Injustice may be supported by the power of the state. There are numerous cases in history where dictatorship wreaked injustice on large and small communities. Our present age is full of these, in all continents. Indeed, some historians have called the twentieth century "the age of dictators." The brutality of some of these dictators is beyond imagination. Yet dictatorship can only flourish when the people allow it a chance to establish its roots. When rulers try to circumvent the law in the early days of their leadership, and discover that they can get away with it, they move towards tyranny. If people stand up to such a person in those early days, this can keep the would-be dictator in check. The Prophet made standing up to tyrannical rule one of the best actions a Muslim can do. He said: "The best of martyrs are Ḥamzah[2] and a person who stands up to a dictator, telling him what to do and what to refrain from, but the dictator kills him." It is well known that Islam makes clear that a martyr is certain to be rewarded by admittance to heaven. Standing up to a dictator gives a Muslim a chance of joining the top elite of martyrs in heaven.

While this is the reward for the individual who is killed by a dictator, the entire community is responsible for stopping a dictatorship. The Prophet warns: "You shall enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong and prevent tyranny or else God shall punish your whole community."

When we take the Prophet's teachings in full, as they address the question of justice at all levels, we are bound to realize that he has provided a complete system that makes justice a prime objective of Muslim society, wherever such a society exists. He teaches that this justice must be administered to all who live in this society, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim. In addition, he shows that it should be a guiding principle in dealing with other communities and states: injustice must not be tolerated at any level. It is as God says in a *ḥadīth qudsī* (a sacred tradition)[3]: "My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice, and made it forbidden to you. So, do not be unjust to one another." (Related by Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah.)

Justice is often obstructed by intercession on behalf of those who do wrong. When the wrongdoer is a person of high position in society, there will always be

[2] Ḥamzah was the Prophet's uncle and a very brave fighter for the cause of Islam. He was killed in the Battle of Uḥud.

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those who can speak strongly on the offender's behalf. Under a dictatorship, it is often easy to thwart justice when the guilty belongs to the dictator's family or circle or party. Even in free societies, attempts are made to help those who wield influence to escape punishment for their offences. The Prophet made it clear that Islamic society allows nothing of this. For example, during the Prophet's lifetime, a woman from the Makhzūm clan of the Quraysh was found guilty of theft. 'Ā'ishah reports that:

> Many people of the Quraysh tribe were troubled by the fact that such a noble woman was to be punished. They wanted someone to speak to the Prophet requesting a pardon for her. It was suggested that the best person to do so was the one who was dearest to him, Usāmah ibn Zayd. Usāmah obliged and spoke to the Prophet. The Prophet was upset. He said to Usāmah: "Are you interceding to suspend a mandatory punishment decreed by God?" He then spoke to the people: "People, know that communities before you came to ruin only because when a nobleman among them was guilty of theft, they left him alone, but when a person of no influence stole, they applied the mandatory punishment. I swear by God Almighty, if Fāṭimah, my daughter, is guilty of theft, I will have her hand cut."[4] (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

This *ḥadīth* is very emphatic in requiring the Muslim community to ensure equality of all people before the law. None can be exempt from it on grounds of nobility, honour, social status or governmental position. Should a community allow such discrimination, it would come to ruin.

Parents and Children

If we were to give a nametag to the society established by the Prophet, we may perhaps call it the "Do Good Society." Islam upholds all the universal values mankind have developed over many generations. In addition, some social values are given particular importance. Foremost among these is dutifulness to parents, even when they are unbelievers. The Qur'ān often mentions dutifulness

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to parents alongside belief in God's Oneness as the most important duties man must observe. Qur'ānic verses leave no room for any doubt that a Muslim cannot be undutiful to parents:

> Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in your care, never say 'Ugh' to them or chide them, but always speak gently and kindly to them, and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say, "My Lord, bestow on them Your grace, even as they reared and nurtured me when I was a child" (17: 23-24)

> Say: "Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not associate partners with Him; [do not offend against but, rather,] be kind to your parents..." (6: 151)

The Prophet provided practical examples of the importance of dutifulness to parents. Many people believe that joining a campaign of jihad (i.e. striving for God's cause) earns great rewards from God. This is true, but it must be put in proper perspective. Sometimes other things take priority. ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr reports that a man came to the Prophet declaring that he wanted to pledge himself to the Prophet doing both the immigration and jihad. He also made it clear that all he was after was God's reward. The Prophet asked him whether either of his parents was alive. The man said that both were alive. The Prophet said: "Do you say that your aim is to earn God's reward?" The man confirmed this. The Prophet said: "Then go back to your parents and attend to their needs with kindness." (Related by Muslim.)

Another version of this *ḥadīth* adds that the man informed the Prophet that when he left his parents, both of them were in tears because he wanted to immigrate. The Prophet told him to go back and make them smile (this version is related by Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.)

As we have seen, kindness to parents is required, even if they are non-Muslims or unbelievers. Asmā' bint Abī Bakr reports that her mother was still an idolater when she came to visit her in Madinah:

> I sought God's Messenger's advice, saying: "My mother has come to visit me and she is unwilling to accept Islam. Should I be kind to my mother?" He said: "Yes, indeed. Be kind to your mother." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The Prophet even made it clear that dutifulness to parents extends beyond their death. Mālik ibn Rabīʿah reports that:

> A man from the Salamah clan asked the Prophet whether there was any aspect of dutifulness to his parents he should do after they had died. The Prophet said: "Yes: to pray for them; to request God's forgiveness for them; to fulfil whatever they had pledged or promised; to be kind to their relatives and to do a kindness to their friends." (Related by ʿAbdullāh, Ibn Mājah and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

It should go without saying that, while dutifulness to parents means kindness to their relatives and friends after their death, this also applies during their life.

The Prophet's teachings became well understood by his Companions. All Muslims were expected to be dutiful to their parents; however, this last point of extending kindness to their friends after their death is not readily apparent to most people. ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar was a learned Companion of the Prophet. When he went to Makkah, he would take a donkey alongside his camel, because he found a donkey less tiring than a camel. One day he saw a Bedouin. He asked him: "Aren't you so and so [naming him and his father]?" The Bedouin said: "I am, indeed." He gave him the donkey and said: "Take this to ride, and take my turban to cover your head." Some friends remonstrated with him, saying: "May God forgive you. Why should you give this Bedouin the donkey when you needed it for a more comfortable ride, and the turban you use to cover your head?" He said: "I heard God's Messenger when he said: 'One of the best acts of dutifulness is to show kindness to those who were friendly with one's father. This Bedouin's father was a friend of my father.'" (Related by Muslim.)

Placing such emphasis on dutifulness to parents and extending it to their relatives and friends is very important. When parents get old and they need attention, it is their children who must look after them to the best of their ability. Relating such dutifulness to what we all hope to receive of God's reward in the Hereafter ensures that even those people who might not be inclined to be kind and dutiful will overcome their reluctance and compel themselves to do the right thing by their parents.

Parents, however, are duty-bound to take good care of all their children. In the Arabian society, people were normally hard. For example, they did not consider it manly for a father to kiss a child. The Prophet emphasized the rights of children, which begin with choosing a good name for every child. Likewise, he confirmed that attending to a child's needs is very important, as young children cannot fend for themselves. Kindness is required toward sons and daughters in

to parents alongside belief in God's Oneness as the most important duties man must observe. Qur'ānic verses leave no room for any doubt that a Muslim cannot be undutiful to parents:

> Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents. Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in your care, never say 'Ugh' to them or chide them, but always speak gently and kindly to them, and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say, "My Lord, bestow on them Your grace, even as they reared and nurtured me when I was a child" (17: 23-24)

> Say: "Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not associate partners with Him; [do not offend against but, rather,] be kind to your parents..." (6: 151)

The Prophet provided practical examples of the importance of dutifulness to parents. Many people believe that joining a campaign of jihad (i.e. striving for God's cause) earns great rewards from God. This is true, but it must be put in proper perspective. Sometimes other things take priority. ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr reports that a man came to the Prophet declaring that he wanted to pledge himself to the Prophet doing both the immigration and jihad. He also made it clear that all he was after was God's reward. The Prophet asked him whether either of his parents was alive. The man said that both were alive. The Prophet said: "Do you say that your aim is to earn God's reward?" The man confirmed this. The Prophet said: "Then go back to your parents and attend to their needs with kindness." (Related by Muslim.)

Another version of this *ḥadīth* adds that the man informed the Prophet that when he left his parents, both of them were in tears because he wanted to immigrate. The Prophet told him to go back and make them smile (this version is related by Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.)

As we have seen, kindness to parents is required, even if they are non-Muslims or unbelievers. Asmā' bint Abī Bakr reports that her mother was still an idolater when she came to visit her in Madinah:

> I sought God's Messenger's advice, saying: "My mother has come to visit me and she is unwilling to accept Islam. Should I be kind to my mother?" He said: "Yes, indeed. Be kind to your mother." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

The Prophet even made it clear that dutifulness to parents extends beyond their death. Mālik ibn Rabīʿah reports that:

> A man from the Salamah clan asked the Prophet whether there was any aspect of dutifulness to his parents he should do after they had died. The Prophet said: "Yes: to pray for them; to request God's forgiveness for them; to fulfil whatever they had pledged or promised; to be kind to their relatives and to do a kindness to their friends." (Related by ʿAbdullāh, Ibn Mājah and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

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equal measure. If anything, the Prophet put stronger emphasis on the rights of girls, because in Arabia the birth of a daughter was often received with gloom. Many Arabs buried their daughters alive because they feared poverty, as girls normally did not earn their living. Thus, the Prophet was very kind to women generally, but he was even kinder to young girls, especially those who were in a weaker position. Needless to say, Islam forbids infanticide for any reason. The Prophet says: "It is enough of a sin for anyone to let those under his care perish." (Related by Abū Dāwūd.) Al-Wādin reports:

> A man said to the Prophet: "Messenger of God, Prior to Islam we lived in a state of ignorance: we worshipped statues and we killed our children. I had a daughter. She was fine and she would respond to me with delight when I called her. One day, I called her to come to me and she followed me. I was close to a well that was not far from our quarters. I took her by the hand and threw her in the well. The last thing I heard of her was her cries to me: 'Father! Father!'" The Prophet's eyes were tearful and his tears were all over his face. A man sitting with the Prophet said to the speaker: "You have upset God's Messenger." The Prophet said to the latter speaker: "Leave him alone. He is asking about something that worries him." He then said to the first man: "Repeat what you have told me." The man repeated his story with his daughter, and the Prophet wept again until his beard was wet with his tears. He then said to the man: "God has pardoned people what they did before accepting Islam. You may resume your good work." (Related by al-Dārimī.)

This was not an isolated case of a man who was too hard. It seems from the fact that he put the case to the Prophet, asking how God will judge him about his deed, and the fact that he could describe the case so vividly, remembering his daughter and how she appealed to him, that he was not. The pressures of society and traditions push people into doing what may not be their preferred course of action. In this instance, he may have wanted to rescue her, but that would have given him a terrible stigma for life. Such a decision would have affected him and his family, branding them as too soft-hearted.

Islam changed all that, and established the principle of equal treatment of all one's sons and daughters. They must be afforded the same rights of care, proper upbringing, education and gifts. Al-Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr reports that his father gave him a slave as a gift, but his mother told her husband that unless he asked the Prophet to witness the gift, she would not agree to it. The father took his son to the Prophet and told him of the gift. The Prophet asked him

whether he had given everyone of his children a similar gift. Bashīr said that he had not. The Prophet told him to take the gift back and added: "Fear God and maintain fairness between your children." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) Another version, related by Muslim, adds that the Prophet told Bashīr when he confirmed that that the gift was just to one of his children: "Do not ask me to witness it, then. I do not witness injustice."

We see the fairness of Islam in action when we look at the Islamic system of inheritance and how children are treated. The system defines the heirs in all sorts of situations. No one can dispose of more than one-third of their property by will. Such will, if any, is made in favour of relatives who are not heirs, or for charitable purposes. The heirs take their shares according to the system, and no one can disinherit any heir for any reason. Children inherit according to the system, which takes into account the different financial responsibilities of sons and daughters, giving sons more in order to discharge such responsibilities. Should a father die when his wife is pregnant, the unborn child inherits alongside its siblings.

The Prophet always cared for the weak and the vulnerable. Women and orphans always received his support, because in the society of the time they were always vulnerable. He says: "By God, it is sinful to deny the rights of the two weak types: women and orphans." (Related by Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim.) Islam works on the two elements that appeal to human nature: reward and punishment. The last statement by the Prophet makes it clear that any denial of the rights of women or orphans is sinful, incurring God's punishment. Reward for taking care of young girls is held clearly before everyone, so that no one would regret having daughters rather than sons. The Prophet says: "God is certain to admit into heaven any father of two daughters if he is kind to them for as long as they are with him." (Related by Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah, al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī.)

All Relatives and Neighbours

These teachings ensure that everyone in the family is well treated. It is not surprising that every Muslim society is blessed with closely-knit families. However, the Prophet looked at the wider picture and stressed the importance of maintaining good relations with all one's relatives. Abū Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: "Whoever is pleased to have his provisions increased and his life extended should be kind to his kinsfolk." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) In this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet raises before us two things that every human being loves to have: a better standard of living and a longer life. This will

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be the reward God grants to people who are kind to their relatives. It is worth noting that the Prophet uses the Arabic term *raḥim* for kinsfolk. This is a word that includes all relatives, but with stronger connotations in referring to female relatives, young and old.

In another statement, the Prophet defines the sort of kindness he wants Muslims to show to their relatives: this is not reciprocating what our relatives do towards us, but rather being kind to those who are unkind to us. ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr reports: "I heard God's Messenger when he said: 'Kindness to relatives is not to return their kindness. It is to be kind to those relatives who turn away.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī.) Another *ḥadīth* elaborates on this quality of maintaining kindness to relatives in the face of their unkind attitude. Abū Hurayrah reports that:

> A man came to the Prophet and said: "Messenger of God, I have some relatives whose relationship I foster but they cut me off. I am kind to them but they are unkind to me. They treat me harshly and I forebear." The Prophet said: "If what you say is true, it is as if you are making them eat burning ashes. You will continue to have God's support against them as long as you maintain your attitude towards them." (Related by Muslim, Aḥmad and Al-Bukhārī in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*.)

The Prophet was keen to spread this concept among his Companions. He expressed its importance in a variety of ways. For instance, ʿUqbah ibn ʿĀmir mentions that he once met the Prophet who said to him: "Foster your relation with those who cut you off; be generous to those who deny you; and forgive those who are unfair to you." (Related by Al-Bukhārī in *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*.)

The Prophet was keen to foster good relations in every neighbourhood of Muslim society. He therefore highlighted the rights of neighbours, to ensure that all Muslims were aware of them. Neighbours are entitled to receive kind and friendly treatment and to have their interests respected. Moreover, everything God has forbidden to do to other people is even more strictly forbidden in the case of neighbours. The Prophet stressed neighbours' rights at every occasion. He also used various types of emphasis to drive his point home. He once repeated an oath three times, saying: "By God, he is not a believer! By God, he is not a believer! By God, he is not a believer..." His audience asked: "Whom do you mean, Messenger of God?" He said: "A person whose neighbour fears his bad turns." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Aḥmad.)

The Prophet's Companions rightly understood the Prophet's teachings to include all neighbours, regardless of whether they were Muslims. ʿAbdullāh ibn

ʿAmr was one of the learned Companions of the Prophet and reported a large number of his statements. Once his family had a sheep slaughtered for food. When he came home, he repeatedly asked his family: "Have you sent some meat to our Jewish neighbour?" He then explained: "I heard God's Messenger when he said: 'Gabriel [the angel] kept urging me to do well by neighbours, making me feel that neighbours would become among one's heirs.'" (Related by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.) This last statement by the Prophet is also related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, through a different chain of transmitters ending with ʿĀ'ishah, the Prophet's wife.

The Prophet wanted neighbours to be very closely connected. Hence, he recommended that they should always exchange presents, as even a small kindness will go a long way towards fostering good relations. He suggested that such presents could be in the shape of giving one's neighbours a dish of one's cooking. He said:

> Do not belittle any small kindness. If you have nothing to offer, then meet your brother with a cheerful face. If you buy some meat or cook something, increase the sauce and give some to your neighbour. (Related by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

Conversely, he viewed any offences against neighbours as a serious grievance. For instance, ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd reports:

> I asked the Prophet which sin is the most serious in God's sight? He said: "To set an equal to God when it is He who created you." I said: "That is serious indeed. Which is the next most serious?" He said: "To kill your child for fear that you have to feed it." I asked: "Which is next?" He said: "To commit adultery with your neighbour's wife." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Adultery is viewed in Islam as a very grave sin; but to commit it with a neighbour adds a very serious dimension to it, namely, ruining relations within the community. Therefore, the Prophet highlighted this and similar offences against neighbours. Al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad reports that:

> The Prophet asked his Companions what they thought about adultery. They answered: "It is forbidden by God and His Messenger. It remains forbidden until the Day of Judgement." The Prophet said: "For a man to commit adultery with ten women is a lesser offence than to commit

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> it with his neighbour's wife." He then asked them what they thought about theft. They said: "It is forbidden as God and His Messenger have prohibited it." He said: "For a man to steal from ten houses is a lesser offence than to steal from his neighbour." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*.)

The circle of good relations was further broadened by the Prophet so as to include the entire neighbourhood. People were encouraged to include their neighbourhood on their joyous occasions, and marriage and childbirth should be celebrated by all of the neighbours. When a man is married, the Prophet strongly recommended that he gives a dinner and invites his neighbours. Likewise, when a child is born, the father is urged to give a dinner on the seventh day of the birth, slaughtering one or two sheep and inviting relatives and neighbours to dinner.

Furthermore, the entire Muslim community stands as a single unit. The Prophet states that "the Muslim community honours the pledge given on their behalf even by the one who is lowest in position among them." He mentioned this when his own daughter, Zaynab, gave a pledge of protection to her husband, Abū al-ʿĀṣ ibn al-Rabīʿ, when he was still an unbeliever. That pledge was binding upon the entire Muslim community. This is just an aspect of the principle of equality of all people that Islam enshrines. Numerous statements were made by the Prophet to warn against denying the weak and vulnerable their rights. Abū Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying: "A person who looks after a widow or a needy person is like one who is fighting for God's cause." Abū Hurayrah adds: "I think that he added, 'and like one engaged all the time in voluntary worship, and one who fasts every day.'" (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

We thus see a society where responsibility is placed at both individual and community levels, to ensure that everyone is given their rights in full. In addition, mutual care is taken so that even the weakest and most vulnerable are well looked after. The contrast between this Islamic society and the one it replaced in Arabia is very stark. Indeed, it contrasts with every human society where universal human values are disregarded.

CHAPTER 13

CHANGING THE STATUS OF WOMEN

LIKE MANY SOCIETIES – both old and new – pre-Islamic Arabia treated women as inferior to men. However, there were differences between tribes with regard to the treatment of women. Although some tribes respected women, they did not treat them as equal to men; the overall picture made women inferior, but the degree of this inferiority varied. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, sometimes girls were buried alive because of fear of poverty. Needless to say, this was not the lot of every young girl, but it was nevertheless considered to be an acceptable practice. A few kind-hearted people tried to save young girls from such a fate by taking over their care and bringing them up. However, the practice is indicative of the status of women in Arabia at the start of the Islamic message.

Women had practically no rights in pre-Islamic Arabia, unless they were rich. A father could give his daughter in marriage to someone without even consulting her. She had no rights of inheritance; on the contrary, in some cases she was considered part of the estate left by her deceased husband. In this circumstance, the chief of the household could inherit her as a wife, or could give her to anyone he liked. Nor were women consulted on family affairs.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a man's world *par excellence*. However, this view of women was by no means unique to Arabia. In the Persian Empire, for example, the Zoroastrian faith flourished:

> In its later version known as Zarvanism, it developed the concept of dualism with Ahriman being the god of evil. Women were his means to lead people astray. Thus, women became part of the realm of evil... The ancient Greeks classified women as inferior creatures whose sole

> it with his neighbour's wife." He then asked them what they thought about theft. They said: "It is forbidden as God and His Messenger have prohibited it." He said: "For a man to steal from ten houses is a lesser offence than to steal from his neighbour." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī in *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*.)

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CHAPTER 13

CHANGING THE STATUS OF WOMEN

LIKE MANY SOCIETIES – both old and new – pre-Islamic Arabia treated women as inferior to men. However, there were differences between tribes with regard to the treatment of women. Although some tribes respected women, they did not treat them as equal to men; the overall picture made women inferior, but the degree of this inferiority varied. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, sometimes girls were buried alive because of fear of poverty. Needless to say, this was not the lot of every young girl, but it was nevertheless considered to be an acceptable practice. A few kind-hearted people tried to save young girls from such a fate by taking over their care and bringing them up. However, the practice is indicative of the status of women in Arabia at the start of the Islamic message.

Women had practically no rights in pre-Islamic Arabia, unless they were rich. A father could give his daughter in marriage to someone without even consulting her. She had no rights of inheritance; on the contrary, in some cases she was considered part of the estate left by her deceased husband. In this circumstance, the chief of the household could inherit her as a wife, or could give her to anyone he liked. Nor were women consulted on family affairs.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was a man's world *par excellence*. However, this view of women was by no means unique to Arabia. In the Persian Empire, for example, the Zoroastrian faith flourished:

> In its later version known as Zarvanism, it developed the concept of dualism with Ahriman being the god of evil. Women were his means to lead people astray. Thus, women became part of the realm of evil... The ancient Greeks classified women as inferior creatures whose sole

function was to continue the species and attend to household chores. A woman was forced to have intercourse [with chosen males] and to practise prostitution. Aristotle ranked her with slaves and said she should receive the same treatment of servants because she was an inferior being, with a weak personality and no will of her own. Woman ranks very low in Plato's *The Republic*: "A man's courage is in commanding; a woman's in performing humble duties…." The Indian Law of Manu says that "a woman belongs to her father in her childhood and her husband in her youth. If her husband dies, she belongs to her sons, and if she has none, she belongs to her husband's male relatives, because she should not be left on her own under any circumstances." A wife was even expected to die with her husband, and to burn with his corpse. If she escaped from death, she was damned through eternity.[1]

From the first day, the Prophet was instructed that his message was addressed to both men and women in equal measure. He therefore sought to remove every impediment to equality, and he addressed both men and women in the same way. In fact, the first person to believe in his message was a woman: his wife, Khadījah. When we look at the religious duties that Islam requires of its adherents, we find that they all apply in equal measure to men and women. Likewise, the reward God grants for them is the same. There are, however, some differences in certain types of worship. These differences account for biological and social differences, but do not ultimately affect a person's status in God's sight. The major difference is that women are not required to pray the five obligatory daily prayers and do not fast in Ramadan when they are in their menstrual period. They compensate for this by fasting the same number of days later in the year, choosing the days that suit them. In everything else, the basic principle repeatedly stated in the Qur'ān applies: "Whoever does righteous deeds, whether man or woman, and is a believer, We shall most certainly give a good life. And We shall indeed reward these according to the best that they ever did." (16: 97)

Islam works on the basis that men and women play different roles in human life: women generally look after the next generation, thus ensuring the community's future well-being; while men earn the family living and look after the present. Since women look after their children and families, they are not required to work in order to earn their living. Their husbands, parents or other close relatives are required to look after them. A woman who has no male relative to look after her is provided for by the Muslim state.

[1] M.H. Al-Khayyāṭ, *Al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah wa Qaḍāyā al-'Aṣr*, Damascus, 2008, pp. 25-28.

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ch are the main principles that Islam requires its followers to implement. e Prophet provided the details and set the best example of their practical plementation. He laid down the rule that a woman may earn and own her ney and property. She has sole discretion as to how this money is spent or vested, provided that she abides by the provisions of Islamic law. She does not ed to bear any expenses of her family, because that is the responsibility of her sband. Her right of ownership is guaranteed by the Qur'ān:

> Do not covet the bounties God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall have a benefit of what they earn and women shall have a benefit of what they earn. Therefore, ask God to give you out of His bounty. (4: 32)

The Prophet made this absolutely clear to his Companions by providing practical examples. One of his wives, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, "used to do some handicraft and give her earnings for charity." (Related by Muslim.) The Prophet urged women to donate to charity, "even though you give some of your jewellery." Having heard this from the Prophet as he addressed women in the mosque, a woman named Zaynab later went to see him. She asked whether she could pay her charity to her poor husband and to orphans she was looking after (these orphans were her relatives). His answer was that, "If she does, she will have double reward: one for being kind to relatives and one for her charity." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

Similarly, Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh reports that his maternal aunt was divorced. She wanted to go to her date farm to supervise the picking of her date harvest. Some of her people tried to stop her from doing so on account that she was still in her waiting period. She went to the Prophet asking him whether she could attend to that task. He said: "Yes, you may go and pick your dates. It may be that you may give some to charity or do something useful." (Related by Muslim.)

All these instances, and several others, confirm the fact that in Islam women enjoy total financial independence. The Muslim woman has an even greater privilege. A man cannot pay his *zakāt* (obligatory charity) to his wife, because he is responsible for her upkeep; while she can pay her *zakāt* to him because she has no such responsibility, even though she may be much richer than him.[2]

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In the society moulded by the Prophet, women also participated in political and social activities alongside their men brethren. Such participation reasserted the fact that in Islam, women enjoy equality in all aspects of life. However, the Prophet outlined certain values that were to be observed in all situations, so that the overall Islamic principles would remain in force.

Emancipation by God's Order

The emancipation of women that took place in Arabia with the advent of Islam was not necessitated by any social or economic circumstances. The only need for it was that God wanted to give mankind a message that provided societies with a solid foundation, in order to ensure happiness for individuals and the community. Therefore, it took care of the needs of both men and women and enhanced their capabilities so that everyone would make their contributions in an atmosphere of unity, complementarity and cohesion. The cornerstone of the relation between the two sexes under God's message is that wives, sisters, daughters and mothers must be well looked after and kindly treated by their menfolk, in all situations. Since wives are the ones who are more likely to be ill-treated, the Prophet always urged kindness towards them. He himself set the best example for all Muslims to follow. He said: "The best among you are those who are best to their wives. I am the best of you to my wives." This short statement provides a principle in the first sentence and a practical example in the second. We must remember that Muslims are required to follow the example set by the Prophet in all matters. He was never unkind to any woman. Once, he was angered by a maid who did something totally unacceptable. In the Arabian society, that maid could have expected a harsh punishment. The Prophet only told her: "Had it not been for my fear of God, I would have punished you with this toothbrush." (Related by Muslim) Needless to say, hitting anyone with a toothbrush can cause nothing more than slight pain. Yet even this was unacceptable to the Prophet.

Despite what we have said about the status of women in Islam, people tend to think that Islam gives women a lower status than men. The criticism often

of gold) must pay *zakāt* at the rate of 2.5% of whatever money he or she has. *Zakāt* is paid out to eight classes of people, including the poor, the needy and insolvent debtors. It is an annual duty. Moreover, it is a self-financing institution as those who are employed in its administration are paid from its revenue. In the absence of Islamic government, individual Muslims must pay it out to its beneficiaries. As it is levied on assets and income, its yield is enormous and there were several examples in history where poverty was eradicated through it.

focuses on certain areas: the permission to beat a wayward wife, polygamy, unequal inheritance and testimony at courts of law. We will briefly discuss all these four areas below, to clarify the true Islamic attitude and the Prophet's guidance.

Wife Beating

Many authentic statements by the Prophet make it clear that he intensely detested the idea of beating one's wife. On more than one occasion he highlighted the highly repugnant situation that such beating leads to: "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?" (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.) He said to his Companions: "The good people among you do not resort to beating their wives." This is a clear statement that makes such beating contrary to goodness of character. Since Islam works to bring about the best in people, it goes without saying that to beat one's wife is contrary to what Islam promotes.

However, the permission to beat one's wife is mentioned in the Qur'ān. We, therefore, need to examine this within its context, and try to understand it in the light of the Prophet's guidance. The only Qur'ānic verse that mentions it reads:

> Men shall take full care of women with the bounties with which God has favoured some of them more abundantly than others, and with what they may spend of their own wealth. The righteous women are devout, guarding the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded. As for those women from whom you have reason to fear rebellion, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them. Then, if they pay you heed, do not seek any pretext to harm them. God is indeed most High, Great. (4: 34)

It is clear from this verse that it is incumbent on men to take full care of women, by providing for them and treating them kindly. The verse also commends righteous women and their behaviour. It then deals with the serious situation of rebellion and outlines three methods of dealing with this. The approach here is gradual, which means that the first method of admonition is the one to be resorted to in all cases. Only when it totally fails and the rebellion continues the second method (of leaving the woman alone in bed) is resorted to. The third method (of corporal punishment) is permissible only when this second method has clearly failed.

Two questions arise here: 1) Is there any clear indication explaining the sort of situation in which this third method can be applied? 2) What is the degree of severity or otherwise that can be exercised?

In answer to both questions, we may quote Asad's footnote commenting on the aforementioned verse:

> [The Prophet] forbade the beating of *any* woman with the words: "Never beat God's handmaidens" (Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Ḥibbān and Ḥākim.) This is a clear prohibition of beating any woman. When the above Qur'ān-verse authorizing the beating of a refractory wife was revealed, the Prophet is reported to have said: "I wanted one thing, but God has willed another thing – and what God has willed must be best" (see Manar V. 74). With all this he stipulated in his sermon on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, shortly before his death, that beating should be resorted to only if the wife "has become guilty, in an obvious manner, of immoral conduct", and that it should be done "in such a way as not to cause pain (*ghayr mubarriḥ*)"; authentic Traditions to this effect are found in Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Mājah. On the basis of these Traditions, all the authorities stress that this "beating", if resorted to at all, should be more or less symbolic – "with a toothbrush, or some such thing" (Ṭabarī, quoting the views of scholars of the earliest times), or even with a folded handkerchief" (Rāzī); and some of the greatest Muslim scholars (e.g. al-Shāfi'ī) are of the opinion that it is just barely permissible, and should preferably be avoided: and they justify this opinion by the Prophet's personal feelings with regard to this problem.[3]

More than One Wife

Polygamy was permitted in most societies for a long time. Polygamy was even permitted in Christian societies during its early period (although it was subsequently prohibited by the church). Islam permits polygamy, but restricts a husband to a maximum of four wives at any time. Islam also stipulates that a husband must treat his wives equally in all situations: he cannot favour one with anything that he denies to his other wives. Moreover, he has to split his nights equally between his wives. The Prophet used to visit every one of his

[3] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, Gibraltar, 1997, pp. 109-110.

wives every afternoon, but he would spend the night with the wife whose turn it was. Islam emphasizes that when a man fears that he may not be able to maintain fair treatment of his wives, he must not marry more than one. The Qur'ān states: "You may marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain fairness between them, then marry only one." (4: 3)

Thus, Islam allows a man to marry more than one wife, but states a strict requirement of fairness in treatment. This applies to everything: including housing, standard of living, gifts and inheritance. Islam views polygamy as the proper solution for various social situations, and it establishes a strict code of morality. Therefore, it regulates relations between the two sexes, making any sexual intercourse outside the bond of marriage a grave sin. Since there may be different cases where the home situation requires another woman to look after the family, Islam wants her to be a legal wife. This is both better for her, as it guarantees her rights, and better for her children, who will be the siblings of their father's children by his other wife or wives. Their rights of education, upbringing, maintenance and inheritance are guaranteed on equal basis. However, the fact remains that one wife is the best situation in most cases.

Societies that have restricted marriage to one wife only could not find a solution for several types of problems that might have serious effect on the continuity of marriage. They generally had to either turn a blind eye to unlawful relations or, as the case in contemporary non-Muslim societies, to adopt a permissive attitude that allows extra-marital sexual relations. The effect of these is often very grave on families, particularly young children.

Women's Inheritance

Although Islam treats both men and women as equals, there are differences in certain provisions of Islamic law. People often use these in support of their claims that Islam views women as inferior. Unfortunately, these detractors do not look at the full picture. Whenever Islamic law gives special provisions for women, the advantage works in women's favour. The best examples of this are inheritance and testimony in court.

The Islamic system of inheritance defines a direct line of heirs that treats spouses, parents and children as heirs of the first degree. When the deceased leaves these behind, no one else inherits anything. The system stipulates certain shares for spouses and parents, which vary according to the presence, or otherwise, of other heirs. For example, the parents' shares are one-sixth of their son's

estate if he has any children. If he has no children, the father takes two-thirds and the mother one-third. This difference is due to the fact that the father is required to look after his wife (the deceased's mother) and meet all her needs. Likewise, the deceased's wife takes one-quarter of the estate if he had no children, while her share goes down to one-eighth in the case of the presence of children. The reason for the difference is that her children are responsible for meeting all of her needs. The children take what is left after the wife and the parents have received their shares. Sons take twice as much as daughters. This is the difference that causes people to claim that Islam discriminates against women. Again the difference in what is assigned to sons and daughters is due to the financial responsibilities of each. Such differences in the shares of males and females do not apply in all cases of inheritance.

The Islamic system of inheritance is very elaborate, leaving no room for disputes among heirs and relatives, because every heir's share is assigned by God and stated in the Qur'ān. This system is based on fairness, but the fairness does not operate using hard figures; it operates in a holistic approach that takes into consideration the financial responsibilities of every one of the heirs. Its guiding principle is that we do not own whatever we have, as this all belongs to God, Who is granting it to us. When we die, it goes back to God, Who divides it according to this system that combines elaborate division with fairness to all.

Testimony in Court

With regard to testimony in court, the Qur'ānic verse that discusses the provisions for loan transactions and commercial dealings includes the following statement:

> Call in two of your men to act as witnesses, but if two men are not available, then a man and two women, whom you consider acceptable as witnesses, so that if either of them should make a mistake, the other will remind her. (2: 282)

This has given rise to criticism of the Islamic system, based on the accusation that Islam discriminates against women in this instance. Yet, such an outcry is due to a misunderstanding of the Islamic requirement, which in fact works in women's favour. Islamic law was designed for implementation in Islamic society, in which a man is responsible for the upkeep of his women folk. Therefore, most Muslim women choose to be housewives: looking after their children and building the future of their community. Some women will still work and may be involved in business or all sorts of work.

Legal experts explain that the working of this provision in practice does not equate two women to one man. On the contrary, the provision gives women a privilege that men witnesses do not enjoy. In his book *Woman in Islam*, Ahmad Zaki Yamani writes:

> Dr Muhammad Saleem al-Awa mentions the practical implementation of the provision requiring two women witnesses in place of one man. The fact, according to him, is that the statement attributed to the Prophet describing a woman's testimony as half that of a man's is meant figuratively. The procedure followed in Islamic courts in the history of Islamic law is that when two women witnesses enter, the judge asks them which of them is the witness and which is the one to remind her. Each will state her role. The judge then orders the witness to take the stand of witnesses and orders the other woman to stand behind her in a position where she is seen by the judge but not by the woman witness. He further instructs the woman acting as a reminder to give him a signal with her hand if she wants to say something. The judge then listens to the testimony of the woman witness in full. If the other woman has given him a signal, he then asks her to say what she has to say. Should he find it to affect the substance of the testimony, he orders that it should be included in the record of the court's session. He then asks the witness if she accepts it as correct. If she approves it and the two women agree, there is no problem. If they differ and the witness insists that her version is correct, the judge will decide between the two and adopt what he determines to be correct. This means that we have actually one woman witness whose testimony might stand as it is, with the reminding witness having nothing to say, or else she might remind the other woman of certain things and they agree the facts.
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not with testimony regarding events. The latter type is proven by the testimony of people who were present at the time and place of the event.

Thus, as scholars made the ruling on testimony concerning people's actions also applicable to testimony on events they have actually exercised their scholarly discretion, or *ijtihād*, in a way that gives women a privilege that man does not enjoy. It does not downgrade her legal or social position in any way.

On this point Imām Ibn Taymīyah is quoted as saying: "The Qur'ān does not mention the two witnesses or the man and two women witnesses as evidence to prove a case. These two methods of proof are mentioned as means to protect one's rights. What proves one's right is completely different from a ruling given by a judge. Means to arrive at such a ruling are much wider than the testimony of a specific number of witnesses."[4]

Participation in Public Life

The first generation of Muslims, i.e. the people who learnt Islam directly from the Prophet and set about implementing it in their life, realized the great change in the status of women that Islam had brought about. They were happy to live by the new standards of Islam. Numerous reports provide a full picture of women's participation in all aspects of life, including military campaigns. The Prophet set them the practical example: whenever he travelled at the head of a military or peaceful expedition, he would draw lots between his wives and would take the winner with him. While many women took part in providing support services, such as looking after the wounded and providing water to the fighters, some of them, including Nasībah bint Ka'b, took part in the actual fighting. During the march there may be time for some sport. 'Ā'ishah reports:

> I joined God's Messenger on one of his expeditions. I was still young and thin. At one point, he said to the people to move forward. When they did, he said to me: "Come and race me." We raced and I won the race. He kept quiet. Later, when I had put on weight and had forgotten the event, I travelled with him on another expedition. He again told the people to move forward and they did. He said to me: "Come, let us race." We raced

[4] Ahmad Zaki Yamani, *Al-Islam wa'l-Mar'ah,* (Arabic edition), London, 2004, pp. 180-182.

> and he won. He laughed and said: "We are even." (Related by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

Such participation in public life encouraged women to take full advantage of their new position. They were prepared to come forward and state in public what Muslim women are normally too shy to discuss. Asmā' bint Yazīd reports:

> We attended at God's Messenger when both men and women were seated. He said to us: "Any man of you may tell others what he does with his wife, and any woman of you may tell what she does with her husband?" All remained silent. I said: "Indeed, Messenger of God. By God, some women do and some men do." He said: "Do not do that. It is just like a male and female devils copulating in public." (Related by Aḥmad.)

The Prophet thus set standards of propriety. What he referred to was men talking to men and women talking to other women about their sexual habits and practices. He wanted that conversation to be kept to private rooms, and just between man and wife: it should never be the subject of social conversation.

More significant in this *ḥadīth*, however, is that a woman spoke out in mixed company, confirming what the Prophet suspected. No one blamed her for doing so. This took a degree of courage that, perhaps, no woman could have had in pre-Islamic days. Asmā' had that sort of courage and was well spoken. As mentioned in Chapter 5, she was the women's spokeswoman, and often asked the Prophet about women's status in comparison with men. It is useful to repeat what she said to the Prophet on that occasion:

> "Messenger of God, I am speaking on behalf of a group of Muslim women who all share my view. God has sent you as a Messenger to both men and women. We believed in you and followed you. However, we, women, stay at home, being housewives. We gratify men's desires and bear their children. Men have the privilege of attending Friday prayers and funerals, as well as taking part in jihad expeditions. When they go on such an expedition, we look after their properties and take care of their children. Do you have a share of their reward for these, Messenger of God?" The Prophet turned towards his Companions and said: "Have you ever heard a woman putting her question about her religion in a better way than this lady?" They said: "This is absolutely true, Messenger of God." He said: "You may go now, Asmā', and tell all women that when any of you looks after her home and takes care of her husband making sure to please

not with testimony regarding events. The latter type is proven by the testimony of people who were present at the time and place of the event.

Thus, as scholars made the ruling on testimony concerning people's actions also applicable to testimony on events they have actually exercised their scholarly discretion, or *ijtihād*, in a way that gives women a privilege that man does not enjoy. It does not downgrade her legal or social position in any way.

On this point Imām Ibn Taymīyah is quoted as saying: "The Qur'ān does not mention the two witnesses or the man and two women witnesses as evidence to prove a case. These two methods of proof are mentioned as means to protect one's rights. What proves one's right is completely different from a ruling given by a judge. Means to arrive at such a ruling are much wider than the testimony of a specific number of witnesses."[4]

Participation in Public Life

The first generation of Muslims, i.e. the people who learnt Islam directly from the Prophet and set about implementing it in their life, realized the great change in the status of women that Islam had brought about. They were happy to live by the new standards of Islam. Numerous reports provide a full picture of women's participation in all aspects of life, including military campaigns. The Prophet set them the practical example: whenever he travelled at the head of a military or peaceful expedition, he would draw lots between his wives and would take the winner with him. While many women took part in providing support services, such as looking after the wounded and providing water to the fighters, some of them, including Nasībah bint Ka'b, took part in the actual fighting. During the march there may be time for some sport. 'Ā'ishah reports:

> I joined God's Messenger on one of his expeditions. I was still young and thin. At one point, he said to the people to move forward. When they did, he said to me: "Come and race me." We raced and I won the race. He kept quiet. Later, when I had put on weight and had forgotten the event, I travelled with him on another expedition. He again told the people to move forward and they did. He said to me: "Come, let us race." We raced

[4] Ahmad Zaki Yamani, *Al-Islam wa'l-Mar'ah*, (Arabic edition), London, 2004, pp. 180-182.

> and he won. He laughed and said: "We are even." (Related by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and Ibn Ḥibbān.)

Such participation in public life encouraged women to take full advantage of their new position. They were prepared to come forward and state in public what Muslim women are normally too shy to discuss. Asmā' bint Yazīd reports:

> We attended at God's Messenger when both men and women were seated. He said to us: "Any man of you may tell others what he does with his wife, and any woman of you may tell what she does with her husband?" All remained silent. I said: "Indeed, Messenger of God. By God, some women do and some men do." He said: "Do not do that. It is just like a male and female devils copulating in public." (Related by Aḥmad.)

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him, she receives as much reward as all you have mentioned of men's privileges." Asmā' left, expressing her pleasure at what God's Messenger had told her by praising and glorifying God.[5]

Take Good Care of Women

The Prophet was keen to ensure that women were well treated. He never tired of telling people that treating women kindly was the mark of good character. To him, the ill treatment of women was contrary to Islamic manners. He was aware, however, that sometimes when men found fault with women, this could be a genuine complaint. There is a trait of impulsiveness in women that God has instilled in their nature: this is necessary in dealing with young children, especially babies. For example, it is instinctive to a mother to immediately respond to the cries of a young child. A mother who hears a bump from a room where she has left a young child will immediately rush to that room to find out if her child is alright. She will forget everything else until she has made sure that the child has not come to any harm. When such impulsiveness is carried into the adult world, however, it can become very irritating: especially when it leads to a superficial approach to something that requires careful consideration. The Prophet dealt with this in a refined manner. He referred to this impulsive trait as a "crookedness" that should be accommodated, and he explained that it is part of nature. Abū Hurayrah quotes the Prophet as saying:

> Take good care of women. They have been created out of a rib. A rib is most crooked at the top. If you try to straighten it, it will snap. If you leave it alone, it remains crooked. Therefore, take good care of women. (Related by al-Bukhārī.)

This *ḥadīth* epitomizes the care the Prophet took of women: he wanted every Muslim to be kind and understanding in the way they treat women. He begins by urging Muslim men to take good care of their womenfolk. He then explains the source of irritation in their nature. He identifies this as something that they cannot help, and he describes this in a graphic manner by pointing out the two alternatives: either to be understanding and accommodating or to try to change a part of nature. He identifies that the latter alternative leads to a break, which in this case means divorce. He concludes by repeating the option he prefers,

[5] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Istīʿāb fi Maʿrifat al-Aṣḥāb*, vol. 4, p. 237.

which is to take good care of women, on the grounds that this is what ensures happy family life.

At the same time, the Prophet stressed, in word and practice, the independence of women. Since, under Islam, women have full financial independence, a woman can conduct her business and deal with others as she pleases. Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī reported that a Bedouin came to the Prophet asking the repayment of a debt the Prophet owed him. He was too insistent that the Prophet should repay him there and then. He even said to him that unless the repayment was made then things would be unpleasant. The Prophet's Companions told the Bedouin off, saying: "Do you know to whom you are speaking in this manner?" He said: "I am only after my right." The Prophet said to them: "You would better side with the one who has a rightful claim." The Prophet then sent a message to Khawlah bint Ḥakīm: "If you have enough dates, lend us some of it until we get our dates and we will repay you then." She answered: "Yes, I will do with pleasure." She lent him the dates. He repaid the Bedouin and gave him extra. The Bedouin said: "You have repaid in full. May God grant you plenty." The Prophet then commented: "Such are the good people. When a weak person cannot claim his right without being subjected to harm, then the whole community is devoid of goodness." (Related by Ibn Mājah, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bayhaqī.)

It should be noted that this took place fourteen centuries ago. At that time, nowhere in the world did women enjoy such financial independence. At that time, the Prophet was the head of the Muslim state. He could have given orders to repay the Bedouin, but he did not do so. Rather, he borrowed from one of his women Companions. He sent directly to her, not to her husband or guardian. She was the one who owned the dates and the request should be put to her directly.

Perhaps it is not surprising that with the development of the Muslim state, the Prophet's successors employed women in responsible positions. For example, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Caliph, appointed al-Shifā' bint ʿAbdullāh as market controller in Madinah. She enjoyed full authority to ensure that transactions were conducted properly and people dealt with each other fairly. This indicates that there were women shopkeepers, as well as women shoppers. The appointment was very successful. When ʿUmar needed to fill the same position in Makkah, he again appointed a woman. Samrā' bint Nuhayk was his market controller there. She was authoritative in dealing with all situations, holding a whip to punish anyone who deserved punishment. ʿUmar himself made remarks wondering at the great change in the status of women that the Prophet had accomplished.

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CHAPTER 14

WHY NINE WIVES FOR MUHAMMAD?

THE WHISPER WENT around fast, as several hundred Arabs sought their immediate relatives and intimate friends in order to give them the news and to discuss its impact. Everyone realized that the news had a bearing on the outcomes of their current achievement: only a month earlier they had accomplished a highly successful mission, but they had now to reconsider what to do with their most valuable gains.

This was in the fifth year after the Prophet's immigration to Madinah (where he had established the first Islamic state). These were years beset with problems, with many enemies attacking the new state as it broke the mould of the Arabian tribal set-up. Up to the start of the Islamic message, the Arabs recognized no bond other than loyalty to their tribes; now the Islamic state in Madinah was forging a new community that gave top priority to faith, a totally different social bond. At that point in time, Muslims belonged to most Arabian tribes; but whereas some tribes had only a handful of Muslims, the two tribes in Madinah, the Aws and the Khazraj, were overwhelmingly Muslim, and accounted for the bulk of the Muslim community.

As head of the Muslim state, the Prophet had to keep a watchful eye so as not to allow any plots and schemes to be devised against Islam. Several Arabian tribes contemplated launching surprise attacks against the Muslim state in Madinah. The Prophet had to have an active intelligence network so as to be aware of what was going on in different areas in Arabia. One day, he learnt that a plot to attack Madinah was being hatched by the Muṣṭalaq tribe, headed by al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Ḍirār. The Prophet implemented a pre-emptive strategy: this used the element of surprise to maximum effect, but without ever launching an attack to take his enemy unawares.

The Prophet had quickly raised a small force of a few hundred of his Companions, and marched speedily, so as to suddenly appear at the doorstep of the Muṣṭalaq tribe. He gave the Muṣṭalaq tribe warning that they would be no match for the Muslims, and should they decide to fight, they would soon be defeated. They nevertheless chose to fight, and soon it was clear to them that an ignominious defeat was in store for them. They surrendered after losing only ten of their men, and many of their men and women were taken captive. According to the rules of war that prevailed at the time, they had to buy their freedom or else be enslaved.

The Prophet, however, was not happy with either option, because this would have deepened hostility and would have placed Islam and the Muslim state at the same level as the rest of the world. He wanted people to look at his message, if not favourably, then at least with a neutral eye. He, therefore, quickly announced his marriage to Barrah, the daughter of al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Ḍirār, the Muṣṭalaq chief who had been plotting against him.

The Prophet's marriage was the subject the whisper that went around in the Muslim camp. If the Prophet married a woman from al-Muṣṭalaq, then the whole tribe were his in-laws: how then could the Muslims detain such people for any length of time, or indeed obtain any type of gain? All Muslims loved the Prophet more than they loved their own families, and more than they loved themselves. Could they embarrass him by keeping his in-laws in custody? Definitely not. By nightfall, all the Muṣṭalaq prisoners, both men and women, were set free in honour of the Prophet.

This marriage by the Prophet was, then, a shrewd political and social decision. It won for Islam an entire tribe which could have, otherwise, joined the allied forces of other major tribes that were shortly to stage a long siege of Madinah. The Prophet changed Barrah's name, calling her Juwayriyyah: Barrah means "dutiful, choosing every good thing." He felt that this name made a claim that could not be substantiated. He changed it in at least one more case, when he called his stepdaughter Zaynab. Juwayriyyah is a form of endearment based on Jāriyah, which means a "young lady".

The Arch Enemy's Daughter

A similar case was that of the Prophet's marriage to Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyayy, a Jewess whom the Prophet married after having inflicted a heavy defeat on her people. Her own father was extremely hostile to the Prophet forging alliances and raising armies against him. He had been killed sixteen or seventeen months earlier. Now Ṣafiyyah was taken prisoner, as were many of her people.

Yet the Prophet offered to marry her, making clear to the Jews that a life of peace between them and the Muslims was possible, if only they would honour their commitment to peace. He had made a covenant with them, shortly after moving into Madinah, and in doing this he established the first pluralist society the world had ever known. However, one Jewish tribe after another violated the covenant and caused their own evacuation from Madinah. Since that time, the Jewish tribes were concentrated at Khaybar and were plotting again to launch an attack on the Muslim state. Again, the Prophet and his army moved fast, and the Jews found them one morning at their doorstep. They immediately withdrew into their own forts, and the Prophet laid siege to them. After a hard battle, they surrendered, and a generous treaty was signed between the two parties allowing the Jews to stay in Khaybar and to look after its agriculture for half its produce.

The Prophet's marriage to Ṣafiyyah was a highly significant announcement to the Jews and to all people that Muslims do not harbour any lasting enmity towards any people. Thus, the attitude of other people determined the relationship: those who wished to live in peace with Islam were welcome. Ṣafiyyah needed time to overcome her grief for her husband who had been killed in the battle and for her father who had been killed earlier, but she soon learnt that her final husband, the Prophet, was the best man she or any woman could have married, and she loved him dearly.

Neither Juwayriyyah nor Ṣafiyyah were old, but they were not very young either, and they were both widows. Juwayriyyah had earlier married a cousin of hers, ʿAbdullāh, and Ṣafiyyah was married twice before the Prophet. Both were pretty, but neither beauty nor age was a factor in their marriages to the Prophet. He was looking at the effect that such marriages would have on the peoples of both women and on the Muslim community.

Another Enemy's Daughter

The Prophet's marriage to Umm Ḥabībah was also made under special circumstances. She belonged to a highly noble family in the Quraysh tribe. Her father was none other than Abū Sufyān Ṣakhr ibn Ḥarb of the Umayyah clan. He was hostile to Islam from the start and fought against it. He became the overall chief of the Quraysh after the Battle of Badr, in which many of the Quraysh chiefs were killed. In his new position he led one fight after another against Islam, until he finally became a Muslim on the day when Makkah fell to Islam.

Umm Ḥabībah (whose name was Ramlah) embraced Islam in its early days, joining her husband ʿUbaydullāh ibn Jaḥsh. The two were among the immigrants

to Abyssinia in the fifth year of the start of Islam. The Muslim immigrants lived in Abyssinia for several years. However, ʿUbaydullāh was befriended by some Christian priests there, who eventually managed to convert him to Christianity. His wife was thus in a terrible situation: she was a firm believer in Islam and immigrated to a foreign country to serve her faith, yet her husband was now opposed to Islam. Nevertheless, they still lived together until ʿUbaydullāh died. Her predicament worsened at that time, as she was alone with her young daughter who was born in Abyssinia. There were a number of Muslims from the Quraysh still with her, and there were many Abyssinian Muslims, but her own personal situation was untenable. She could not return to her father who was leading the fight against Islam. She could not travel to Madinah, which was now the main base of Islam. She had to stay with her people, among whom she had only some distant cousins.

One day, she heard a knock on her door. She opened it, to find a lady from the palace of Negus (the Abyssinian king) telling her that he had received a message from the Prophet in Madinah asking him to arrange her marriage to the Prophet. She was delighted with the news. She appointed Khālid ibn Saʿīd, a cousin of hers, as her guardian. The Muslims from the Quraysh were invited that night to the King's palace, where Negus himself officiated at the marriage and gave Ramlah her dowry on behalf of the Prophet. She then travelled with the Prophet's emissary, ʿAmr ibn Umayyah, to Madinah. When Abū Sufyān received the news of her marriage to the Prophet, he said of the Prophet: "He is an honourable man who cannot be faulted."

We do not know the date of her marriage to the Prophet, or the exact date of her travel to Madinah. Historians at the time did not attach much importance to the dates of the events they reported, as they concentrated on the event itself. We can say, however, that the marriage took place a few years after the Prophet's immigration to Madinah: possibly in the fourth year, but definitely before the end of the sixth year. In the sixth year, the Prophet sent an emissary to Negus requesting the repatriation of the Muslim immigrants to Abyssinia. We cannot tell if Ramlah was among this last group, as she is not mentioned in any report that speaks of them. However, only a few are mentioned by name. Had the marriage taken place at that time, there would have been some mention of it in the reports about the repatriation, but there is none, which suggests that it took place at an earlier date, and on an earlier visit to Abyssinia by the Prophet's emissary, ʿAmr ibn Umayyah.

Ramlah showed herself to be a devoted wife of the Prophet. She deeply appreciated the great blessing of becoming a "mother of the believers" (as his wives were and continue to be called) and would not exchange this position for

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anything in the world. We must not underestimate the honour these women received. All Muslims, throughout the world and in all generations, look at them with reverence, honour them and pray for them. Their names are given to girls in all generations. They are always remembered with the noble company of none other than God's Messenger.

Juwayriyyah, Ṣafiyyah and Ramlah were daughters of chiefs who were determined opponents of the Prophet. All of these chiefs fought him in battle, although Juwayriyyah's father's fight was very short lived. What concerns us here is the fact that the Prophet saw fit to marry their daughters. In the cases of both Juwayriyyah and Ṣafiyyah, a different victor could have chosen to put them to slavery, perhaps in his own palace, or he could have given them to low-ranking soldiers to serve in their homes. Nothing was furthest from the Prophet's mind, as he never considered revenge or the humiliation of an opponent; justice was always his primary consideration. He showed that although the fathers of those women were hostile to him, the daughters could not be punished for their fathers' guilt. We see in this a manifestation of the key to the Prophet's character: the pursuit of right. The Prophet made it clear that it is not right to punish anyone for someone else's crime. Moreover, the Prophet saw every man and woman as a potential Muslim. They were all addressed by God's message. He wanted to deliver that message to everyone. He also wanted to cultivate the goodwill of the tribes and communities to which these women belonged. Hence, by taking them into his household and making them mothers of the believers he gave them a much valuable prize. He also ensured that peace would replace enmity between the Muslims and former enemies. In the case of Ramlah, his motive was compassion. He fully understood her predicament: a forlorn mother of a young daughter in a foreign country, too far from all relatives and from the community of believers to which she belonged, with her father fighting hard to suppress her religion. Taking a woman whom he had not seen for more than ten years into his household because of the difficult situation she found herself in was the natural response of the man God sent as "mercy to all the worlds." (21: 107)

Divine Order to Marry

The Prophet married several women, within a relatively short period of time, and when he died, he had nine wives. This leads to the question: does that make him a womaniser? We cannot answer this question without looking at his life as a whole and answering several other questions: how many women did he marry altogether? At what age was he when he married each one of them? Were there any special reasons for marrying any of them? What sort of women were they

and how old? All these are relevant questions for drawing a complete picture, particularly given the onslaught in modern times against Islam and the Prophet who preached it.

The Prophet married all his wives (except Khadījah) when he was over fifty years of age. All his marriages had specific reasons, and were necessitated by the overall circumstances in which he and the new Muslim community found themselves. Some had social or political reasons; others had a legislative cause, like his marriage to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh whose mother was the Prophet's paternal aunt. In fact, this latter marriage was made on specific orders from God as mentioned in the Qur'ān:

> Whenever God and His Messenger have decided a matter, it is not for a believing man or a believing woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter. Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger strays far into error. You did say to the one to whom God had shown favour and you had shown favour, "Hold on to your wife and have fear of God." And thus you would hide in your heart that which God wanted to bring to light. You stood in awe of people, whereas it was God alone of whom you should have stood in awe. Then, when Zayd had come to the end of his union with her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that no blame should attach to the believers for marrying the spouses of their adopted sons when the latter have come to the end of their union with them. God's will must be fulfilled. (33: 36-37)

Some of the reasons for this marriage went back more than three decades, when Zayd ibn Ḥārithah was a young lad, kidnapped by some people who raided his tribe's quarters while most men of the tribe were away. The kidnappers sold him as a slave, and he ended up in Makkah where his owner made of him a gift to his niece: who was none other than Khadījah. She gave Zayd to her new husband, Muhammad, shortly after their marriage, which took place some fifteen years before prophethood. Muhammad loved Zayd and treated him very kindly. Zayd realized that there was something special about Muhammad and he reciprocated his love. When Zayd's father learnt that his son ended up in Makkah, he came over to try to get him back. He offered to buy him from Muhammad for a fair price, but Muhammad gave him a better option. He offered Zayd the choice of either to go back home with his father or stay with him.

The father expressed his gratitude, feeling that Zayd was soon to be reunited with his people, but he received a great shock when Zayd chose to stay with

anything in the world. We must not underestimate the honour these women received. All Muslims, throughout the world and in all generations, look at them with reverence, honour them and pray for them. Their names are given to girls in all generations. They are always remembered with the noble company of none other than God's Messenger.

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The Prophet and the Muslims of Makkah immigrated to Madinah thirteen years after the start of Islam. New laws for the fledgling Islamic state were being revealed by God, and these organized all aspects of life, including marriage, family relations and inheritance. A certain legislation dealt with the question of adoption. The Qur'ān makes it clear that adoption, in the sense of making a person the son or daughter of a couple who are not the real parents, asserted a falsehood that Islam does not accept. God says:

> Never has God put two hearts in one man's body. Nor does He make your wives whom you declare to be as unlawful to you as your mothers' bodies truly your mothers. Likewise, He does not make your adopted sons truly your sons. These are only words you utter with your mouths, but God says the truth and He alone shows the right path. Call them by their fathers' names; that is more just in God's sight. If you do not know who their fathers are, then treat them as your brethren in faith and your protégés. You shall not be blamed if you make a mistake, but for what your hearts intend. God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (33: 4-5)

Immediately after the revelation of these verses Zayd reverted to his original name and from then onwards was known as Zayd ibn Ḥārithah.

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The First Marriage

Non-Muslims today try to find fault with the Prophet for his marriages. They are at pains to highlight certain aspects surrounding these marriages, looking at them from today's social perspective, pointing out age difference in one case and social position in another, trying to cast aspersions on the Prophet for his marriages; Muslim writers, on the other hand, are often at pains trying to justify each marriage. Neither attitude is correct. There is no need to be apologetic about the Prophet's practice or his marriages.

A man's attitude to women, sex and marriage is most apparent when he is in the prime of life, having the opportunity to consort with women. Muhammad grew up in a society that made no restriction on relations with women. A man could marry as many wives as he wanted, and if he did not wish to marry, sex was available with little blame attached to promiscuity. Having many children, particularly male children, was an advantage. Children born outside marriage

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were accepted, and a father of such a child had no problem acknowledging his parenthood of that child and giving the child his name.

Muhammad always disliked the idolatrous aspects of his people's religion and practices, but he had no notion of religion until he began to receive Divine revelations at the age of forty. Yet, he tells us that even in his years of adolescence and early adulthood, he indulged in no loose behaviour or debauchery of any type. Only on two occasions as a teenager he felt an inclination to have a "night of fun", as other young men had. He was still working as a shepherd at the time. He asked one of his fellows to look after his sheep and went out seeking some pleasure. On both occasions, standing near a house where a party was going on, he was overtaken by sleep, waking up after sunrise. This was part of God's protection of the man who would become His Messenger.

Then Muhammad married Khadījah, the wealthy widow who had previously employed him to conduct some of her business in the markets and bazaars of Arabia. She had sent him as her agent with the Quraysh's traditional trade caravan to Syria, where he earned her admiration for his absolute honesty and business acumen. She offered marriage and he willingly accepted. He lived with her until she died twenty-five years later, and he entertained no thought of another marriage. Polygamy was common practice in Arabia, but he would have none of it, even though the common notion remains that she was much older than him. Most people say that he was twenty-five and she was forty when they married, although this is probably untrue. The existing reports give different figures for their respective ages: they suggest that he was twenty-one, twenty-five, twenty-eight or thirty, while she is mentioned to have been twenty-eight, thirty, thirty-five, forty or even forty-five. In Arabia there was no register of births and deaths at the time: indeed, the Arabs had no recognized calendar. They dated events in relation to some major events that took place in their lifetime. Thus, the reference date was always changing. In such a community where literacy was a rare commodity, it was very difficult to determine dates of events and people's ages with any degree of accuracy.

When we have all these quoted figures for Khadījah's age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet, with little information to give any of them a greater measure of reliability apart from the reliability of the quoted authority, we have to look at other evidence in order to obtain a more realistic figure for her age. Fortunately, we have such evidence in the fact that she gave the Prophet six children. Although a sizeable portion of women will have given birth to one or two children by forty years of age, it is hardly likely that a woman would give birth to six children when she is in her forties. Such fertility is unknown in women of this age anywhere. Perhaps a more reliable report is attributed

to Ibn ʿAbbās, which tells us that they both were twenty-eight at the time of their marriage. On the other hand, we may conclude that she was older than Muhammad by a few years: with him being not less than twenty-five and she not older than thirty-two. Theirs was a very happy and faithful marriage, giving both man and wife every satisfaction. He lived thirteen years after her death, but continued to fondly remember her to the end of his life.

ʿĀ'ishah's Age

The question of age is even more acute when the Prophet's marriage to ʿĀ'ishah is discussed, because it is frequently stated that she was only nine years of age when the Prophet married her. Muslim writers try to defend this marriage by referring to local social traditions at the time, when age difference between couples was of no concern. While this is true, there can be no real basis for the other argument that women in Arabia attained puberty at an early age. This is an assumption that cannot be borne out by the literature of the period. On the other hand, some Orientalists and other writers that show no good will to Islam try to create fuss over the matter, accusing the Prophet of marrying a child when he was fifty-three.

Both types of argument should be discounted. An objective study should easily establish that ʿĀ'ishah could not have been less than eighteen or twenty at the time of her marriage. Consider the following facts:

1. ʿĀ'ishah was suggested to the Prophet as a possible wife three years before the marriage actually took place, which would have meant that she was six when she was recommended to him. The woman suggesting her mentioned that he needed a wife to give him company and comfort after Khadījah, his first wife, had died. The Prophet had four daughters by his first marriage, the youngest of whom was over that age. He certainly needed a wife to give him support and comfort. Could a child of six or nine years give him that? Would not she be an added burden to him? Is it logical that Khawlah bint Ḥakīm, the woman who suggested that he should get married, highlighting his need for home support, should propose to him such a child? In fact, she suggested two women: a mature woman, Sawdah, who had already been married, and a virgin, ʿĀ'ishah. The disparity between the two in age, were we to accept that ʿĀ'ishah was six, meant that Sawdah could have been ʿĀ'ishah's grandmother.
2. ʿĀ'ishah had already been engaged to Jubayr ibn Muṭʿim, and her engagement was broken off before she got engaged to the Prophet. Could

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Both types of argument should be discounted. An objective study should easily establish that ʿĀ'ishah could not have been less than eighteen or twenty at the time of her marriage. Consider the following facts:

1. ʿĀ'ishah was suggested to the Prophet as a possible wife three years before the marriage actually took place, which would have meant that she was six when she was recommended to him. The woman suggesting her mentioned that he needed a wife to give him company and comfort after Khadījah, his first wife, had died. The Prophet had four daughters by his first marriage, the youngest of whom was over that age. He certainly needed a wife to give him support and comfort. Could a child of six or nine years give him that? Would not she be an added burden to him? Is it logical that Khawlah bint Ḥakīm, the woman who suggested that he should get married, highlighting his need for home support, should propose to him such a child? In fact, she suggested two women: a mature woman, Sawdah, who had already been married, and a virgin, ʿĀ'ishah. The disparity between the two in age, were we to accept that ʿĀ'ishah was six, meant that Sawdah could have been ʿĀ'ishah's grandmother.
2. ʿĀ'ishah had already been engaged to Jubayr ibn Muṭʿim, and her engagement was broken off before she got engaged to the Prophet. Could

she have been engaged at the age of five or six? It was a serious engagement, not a casual talk between families. Abū Bakr, ʿĀ'ishah's father, needed to skilfully withdraw from that engagement when he realized that the Prophet wanted to marry her. Besides, neither of her parents suggested that she was too young for marriage. Indeed, they would not have accepted her earlier engagement if she was too young.

3. In the most reliable, and oldest, biography of the Prophet by Ibn Isḥāq, ʿĀ'ishah is mentioned among the first fifty people to have accepted Islam in its early days (in fact, she is number nineteen on the list). On this list she is mentioned to have been young at the time, yet the list does not include any children. All those included in this report converted to Islam more than eight years before ʿĀ'ishah's marriage. Most of them joined the immigration to Abyssinia in the fifth year of the start of Islam (i.e. eight years before the immigration to Madinah). This means that at that time, she was young, but old enough to accept a new religion. Could she have been less than ten at the time of her adoption of Islam? Would any historian include a child less than ten in any meaningful list of converts? If she was ten when she adopted Islam, then at the time of her marriage she was eighteen or older.
4. ʿĀ'ishah is authentically reported by al-Bukhārī to have been with the Muslim army in the Battle of Uḥud, nursing the wounded. This battle took place eighteen months after her marriage, which means that had she been nine at the time of her marriage, so she would have been eleven at the time of the battle. Before the battle, the Prophet examined his troops and ordered every young man below fifteen years of age to go back home. Could he have allowed a girl of eleven to stay with the army?
5. ʿĀ'ishah was renowned for her in-depth knowledge of Islam. Her knowledge was not that of someone who memorizes information and recounts it when needed: it was of the analytical and critical type, as is clear from her numerous arguments with other Companions of the Prophet over a wide range of questions. All her knowledge came directly from the Prophet. Such knowledge could not be acquired in adolescent years, which suggests that she was at a more mature age when she was married to the Prophet.
6. According to existing reports her parents were married ten years before the start of Islam. Abū Bakr was twenty-eight at the time. He had two children by an earlier marriage and two by this marriage. In the absence of any effective methods of birth control at the time, it is reasonable

to assume that the two children were born in the first five years of the marriage. If so, she would be twenty by the time of her marriage.

7. A counter argument is always given on grounds that a *ḥadīth* related by al-Bukhārī gives her age at the time of the marriage as nine. However, this *ḥadīth* is attributed to Hishām ibn ʿUrwah who learnt it from his father. Hishām related it when he was in Iraq. Scholars of *Ḥadīth* mention that although Hishām was a reliable reporter, he was less accurate with what he reported in Iraq from his father. This raises a question mark about the authenticity of this *ḥadīth*.
8. Another *ḥadīth*, also related by al-Bukhārī, quotes ʿĀ'ishah as saying that by the time she was old enough to understand religion her parents were already Muslims. She puts that in historical perspective, mentioning the event when her father prepared to immigrate to Abyssinia. This was in the fifth year of the start of Islam and nine years before her marriage. If she was eight when this intention to immigrate took place, she would have been seventeen at the time of her marriage.

When we look at these facts, and bear in mind that several other Companions of the Prophet are given ages that could not in any way be reconciled with events in which they were prominent participants, we have to conclude that such figures are unreliable. These reported ages need to be approached critically, bringing in other factors in order to obtain a more informed idea of their status.

As for the Prophet, he was the perfect model for humanity. Unfortunately, Muslims show him to have married an old woman when he was a young man, and a child when he was approaching old age. This is unfair to the Prophet, because neither assumption can stand up to considered analysis.

The Other Wives

The first woman the Prophet married after Khadījah was Sawdah bint Zamʿah. She was a mature woman who had five children by her earlier marriage. Her first husband was her cousin al-Sakrān ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAbd Shams of the ʿĀmir clan of Quraysh. She and her first husband were among the early Muslims who immigrated to Abyssinia, but they returned to Makkah earlier than other immigrants. Al-Sakrān died soon afterwards. We have two reports: one mentions that his death was before he arrived in Makkah, and the other shortly after arrival. The Prophet married her a few months after his wife's death and she lived nearly ten years after he had passed away.

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The Prophet married most of his wives in Madinah. Sawdah was his only wife for around three years. He married ʿĀ'ishah about ten months after he immigrated to Madinah, but she was engaged to him for three years. Then he married Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, his second closest Companion. Again, she was a widow. Her first husband, Khunays ibn Ḥudhāfah, belonged to her own clan of Quraysh. Prior to his marriage, Khunays ibn Ḥudhāfah joined the Muslim immigrants to Abyssinia, and returned to Makkah at a later date. He then joined the immigration to Madinah and fought in the Battle of Uḥud, receiving a wound that proved fatal. Ḥafṣah was in her early twenties when she married the Prophet, in the fourth year of the Islamic calendar.

The Prophet thus married the daughters of his two closest Companions, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, who were to succeed him as rulers of the Muslim state. The other two of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, ʿUthman and ʿAlī, were his sons-in-law: with ʿUthman marrying first Ruqayyah then Umm Kulthūm, and ʿAlī marrying the Prophet's youngest daughter, Fāṭimah. This means that ʿUthmān was the only man in human history to marry two daughters of a Prophet.

Also in the fourth year, the Prophet married Zaynab bint Khuzaymah, who was also a widow. Reports mention that she was married twice before the Prophet. She was very generous and very kind to the poor, earning for herself the nickname "mother of the poor". However, she lived with the Prophet only for a few months, perhaps only two, before she passed away. Some reports mention that she was only thirty when she died, but reports of people's ages in that period are far from reliable.

Umm Salamah Hind bint Abī Umayyah, a Qurayshi from the Makhzūm clan, was the next wife of the Prophet. She was earlier married to ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbd al-Asad who was wounded in the Battle of Uḥud. He recovered and was well enough to lead an expedition of jihad afterwards, but he died soon after when his earlier wound opened again. The Prophet valued this Companion of his very dearly. When Abdullāh ibn ʿAbd al-Asad died, the Prophet led the prayer for the deceased for him. This prayer consists of four glorifications of God, reading the Qur'ān and some supplication for the deceased in between these glorifications. This time, however, the Prophet said nine glorifications. When asked whether this was due to some distraction or forgetfulness. He replied that it was not: "Had I said a thousand glorifications for him, he would well merit this."[1]

[1] Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Iṣābah*, vol. 8, p. 240

Umm Salamah reports:

> Before his death, my husband said to me that he had listened to the Prophet when he said: "If any believer who suffers a calamity says: 'We all belong to God, and to Him we shall return. My Lord, help me through my calamity and grant me what is better,' God will certainly give him better compensation." When my husband Abū Salamah died, I said this prayer. I then thought: "Where can I find a man better than Abū Salamah? I hope though that God will reward me and compensate me for my loss." Some time later, the Prophet proposed to marry me. (Related by Muslim.)

Umm Salamah had four children by her previous marriage. She had no shortage of proposals, some from the leading figures among the Prophet's Companions, but she declined these. When the Prophet sent her a message proposing marriage, she sent him a gentle apology saying that she was "very jealous, old and a mother of several children." The Prophet replied with a message that said: "God may cure you of your jealousy. I am older than you and your children will be well looked after by God and His Messenger."[2] The marriage then took place towards the end of the fourth year.

Between the beginning of year 5 and the early months of year 7 AH, the Prophet married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, Juwayriyyah, Ramlah and Ṣafiyyah. A few weeks before the end of year 7, he married his last wife, Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith. Her original name was Barrah, but the Prophet did not like that name and changed it in two other cases of his relatives. She was a half sister to his deceased wife Zaynab bint Khuzaymah. After the death of her first husband, Abū Ruhm ibn Abd al-ʿUzzā, she is reported to have appointed her sister Umm al-Faḍl as her guardian. Umm al-Faḍl was married to al-ʿAbbās, the Prophet's uncle. Al-ʿAbbās, who was still living at Makkah at the time, spoke about her to the Prophet when he and his Companions visited Makkah for three days to offer the *ʿUmrah*. The Prophet married her, and she is said to have been twenty-six at the time of her marriage to him.

The Coptic Maid

Maria, the Egyptian Copt, should be mentioned here. Early in the seventh year of his settlement in Madinah, the Prophet sent letters to the Emperors of

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Byzantium and Persia, as well as to the rulers of neighbouring countries and areas. He told them in these letters of his message and called on them to believe in God's Oneness and his message. He warned them of God's punishment if they refused, and told them also that if they did refuse, they would bear responsibility for their peoples. Negus and the ruler of Bahrain responded favourably and accepted Islam; the Persian Emperor, however, took a very hostile attitude. Heraculas, the Byzantine Emperor, recognized the truth of the Prophet's message but realized that he risked an uprising against him if he were to accept. Al-Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt, who was also the head of the Coptic Church, said to the Prophet's emissary that he was aware that a final Prophet was due and that this Prophet would preach God's final message, but he had thought that this Prophet would not be an Arab. He therefore did not accept Islam, but sent the Prophet a courteous reply and a gift consisting of some clothing, a white mule and two slave girls: Maria and Sīrīn. He told him that they were highly valued by the Copts. The Prophet accepted the gift and realized that al-Muqawqis feared for his position as ruler.

The Prophet took Maria to himself and gave Sīrīn to one of his Companions. Maria gave him a son he named Ibrāhīm (this name is the Arabic version of Abraham). Ibrāhīm lived only eighteen months. Maria remained with the Prophet for the rest of his life. She died in year 16 AH, during the reign of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second Caliph. Some scholars mention her among the Prophet's wives, but the majority of scholars maintain that she remained a slave.

Islam did not forbid slavery outright, but put in place laws and regulations that would ensure the end of the slavery system in a short period of time. These did indeed put an end to all sources of slavery with the exception of prisoners of war. Even in the latter circumstances individuals could only become slaves if the ruler imposed it on them. The reason for leaving this was that it was a universal system that could not be unilaterally ended. The fact that it remained up to the Muslim ruler to impose meant that no ruler should impose it if the enemy did not operate it or if there was an agreement to stop slavery. Clearly the Muslim state was intended to be in the forefront of such an agreement.

No Justification Needed

These were the women the Prophet married. I have explained the circumstances leading to four of these marriages. Three of them were daughters of enemies who fought him in battle, but he took very kind care of them and made them "mothers of the believers." The fourth was given to him by Divine order so as

to put a practical end to a false system that God wanted to abrogate. Legislative reasons might have been behind two other cases. Maymūnah was a sister of his deceased wife Zaynab bint Khuzaymah. Although other religions forbid such a marriage, Islam allows it. The case of Maria demonstrates the situation of a slave woman: she was lawful to her master in addition to his four wives. Alternatively, she could marry someone else and remain a slave. Her marriage was recognized as full marriage and she became unlawful to anyone other than her husband. On the other hand, if her master keeps her to himself and she gives him a child, her status becomes "mother of a child." In this situation, she cannot be sold or given as a gift, and she remains with her master. Once he dies, she becomes free by virtue of having had a child. It may be said that such rules could have been stated and implemented with no need for the Prophet to practise them. However, to say so is to try to impose our own standards on a situation that existed fourteen centuries ago. Moreover, we need to remember that the Prophet's example is better understood in all generations and by all communities than any legal provision in a code of law.

The circumstances that led to any of these marriages may be explained and studied, but I do not cite these in order to justify the Prophet's actions in marrying these women. As no justification is needed for any action by the Prophet, an apologetic attitude is unnecessary. In His infinite wisdom, God exempted His Messenger Muhammad from the restriction of four wives, allowing him to marry any number of women. The fact that nine of his wives survived him and two died during his lifetime does not restrict him to that number. At one stage, this exemption was stopped by God, who told him:

> You [Muhammad] are not permitted to take any further wives, nor to exchange these for other wives, even though you are attracted by their beauty, except for any that your right hand may possess. God keeps watch over all things. (33: 52)

This makes it clear that the Prophet followed God's instructions. He availed himself of the exemption God had given him, using it at any time he felt that taking a certain woman as a wife served Islam. Yet, non-Muslims may find it difficult to understand this: particularly in the present environment, when certain social values try to impose their stamp on life. Many non-Muslims criticize Islam for allowing polygamy or for making divorce simple, but an objective consideration of Islamic legislation about marriage and divorce will always reveal that it caters for all needs and all situations in an atmosphere that promotes fine morality.

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All Muslims believe that God gave Muhammad what He determined to be best for Islam. This applied to his marriages and to the other areas of his life. Consider, for example, the fact that he had six children by his first wife; yet none of his other wives gave him a child, despite the fact that several of them had children by other marriages and several were in their twenties or thirties. He had a child only by Maria, who was the last of them all. He was over sixty at the time when his last child was born. In all this we see Divine will in operation.

The Prophet's wives were not allowed to marry anyone after he had passed away. They would not have been likely to choose to marry another man: who would replace the Prophet for any of them? However, the reason for that is the fact that in the life to come a woman is joined to her last husband in heaven. Given a choice, they would have chosen no one else to be with than Muhammad, God's Messenger.

Life in the Prophet's Home

When the Prophet sent his proposal to Umm Salamah, the grounds she gave with her gentle apology included that she was a jealous woman. Jealousy is natural to most women. ʿĀ'ishah, who was young and pretty, mentions how jealousy prompted her reaction on several occasions. How, then, did the Prophet manage with all these women? To start with, the idea of polygamy was acceptable to them. They grew up in homes where most men were polygamous. Even those whose fathers married only one wife accepted polygamy as normal, because it was the norm in their society and was practised all around them. Nevertheless, jealousy surfaced sometimes. ʿĀ'ishah tells us that on one of her nights, she woke up to find that the Prophet had gone out. The first thought she had was that he might have gone to one of his other wives. She went out to look for him. She then saw him coming back from the cemetery where he was praying for the dead of the Muslim community. ʿĀ'ishah was even jealous of his deceased wife, Khadījah, because the Prophet often mentioned her with apparent fondness.

The Prophet had a separate home for each one of his wives. These were simple, one-room homes next to the mosque. He never discriminated among them in the way he treated them. To him, they were all equal, although he loved ʿĀ'ishah most; he used to pray to God to pardon him that, as this was not within his control. He used to say in his supplication: "My Lord, You see what I do in the area I control. Please forgive me what is beyond my control." The proximity of their living quarters and the rivalry to win favour with their unique husband led them to divide into two groups: those who supported ʿĀ'ishah, as they realized

they could not compete with her; and those who insisted that they were equal to her. This latter group was headed by Umm Salamah. Nevertheless, we must not read too much into that rivalry, as ultimately they were all good believers, and were devout and virtuous. They realized that it was by God's grace that they were married to the man He chose as His Messenger to mankind.

However, life in the Prophet's home was not easy, as he cared little for any sort of luxury. When things were difficult and the whole Muslim community was poor, his wives endured their lot with patience. Later on, when the fortunes of the Muslim community changed considerably, the Prophet's wives felt that this should be reflected in the Prophet's homes. They all put together a request for an easier, more comfortable life. This apparently angered the Prophet. There are no details about the argument that took place, but we can assume that the Prophet explained that he had to look after the whole community. He also felt that the transitory nature of this present life did not call for luxurious living, when there were still some poor people in the community. It appears that his wives were insistent and he was angry. He decided to punish them by staying away from them for a month. This caused a stir in the Muslim community as people thought at first that the Prophet divorced all his wives. However, ʿUmar was allowed in and he confirmed that no divorce had taken place.

At the end of the month the Prophet acted on God's instructions and offered a choice to every one of his wives. This is stated in the following verses of the Qur'ān:

> Prophet! Say to your wives: If you desire the life of this world and its charms, I shall provide for you and release you in a becoming manner; but if you desire God and His Messenger and the life of the Hereafter, know that God has readied great rewards for those of you who do good. (33: 28-29)

Starting with ʿĀ'ishah, the Prophet said to her: "I am going to tell you something which I would like you to consider carefully and consult your parents before you decide." He then read to her those two verses. She immediately said to him: "Would I consult my parents about staying with you? I certainly choose God and His Messenger. However, I would request you not to mention my choice to any of your other wives." He said to her: "God has not sent me to adopt a hard attitude, but He has made me a teacher and a facilitator. If any of them asks me about your choice, I will tell her." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

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[3] Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*, vol. 14, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2006, pp. 63-64.

CHAPTER 15

MUHAMMAD: THE MILITARY COMMANDER

SHORTLY BEFORE THE START of the Battle of Badr, the first major battle in the history of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent a message to the Quraysh telling them that when it came to war, he would rather not fight them. He indicated that they had no reason to fight him and his Companions, and that, therefore, a peace arrangement should be easily agreed upon. One of the leaders of the Quraysh, ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah, accepted the logic that a battle was unnecessary and tried to persuade his people to abandon their hostile attitude. However, Abū Jahl and other hardliners were determined to go on the warpath and were soon able to drag everyone into an unnecessary battle that ended in a great triumph of the Muslim army over a much larger force of unbelievers.

This epitomizes the attitude of Islam to war: it must be avoided as far as possible, but it cannot be ruled out altogether because others may resort to battle. Hence, a Muslim state that finds itself in conflict with others should be prepared for battle, while trying to steer away from this situation as much as possible. The Islamic view of war is that it must always be defensive, aiming to establish right and justice to all. A battle can only be fought to remove injustice, tyranny and aggression. However, Islam takes a broad view of human life. All humanity is addressed by the Divine message. Muslims assert that it is right, therefore, that this message be placed before people wherever they live.

Nowadays, we speak much of human rights. Islam established its vision of human rights at the very beginning of its message, fourteen centuries ago. Islam makes the right to freedom the most important right of every male and female. This right even takes precedence over the right to life. Needless to say, the right to life is granted by God Almighty to every child of either sex. However, God states in the Qur'ān: "Oppression is even worse than killing" (2: 191), and,

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"Religious persecution is worse than killing" (2: 217) The Arabic term *fitnah* is used in both statements, but it is translated as "oppression" in one case and "religious persecution" in the other, in order to reflect the drift of the contexts in which it occurs. By making freedom the basic and most essential human right, Islam ennobles man. When freedom is denied, people are unable to exercise their humanity, and they become like machines; that is, they are even worse than animals, who act on instinct.

Islam requires the Muslim community to remove any impediment to the exercise of the right to freedom. Islam asserts that placing impediments to freedom is unjust, and requires the removal of injustice. This is part of the overall Islamic vision of humanity, our place on earth and the role God has assigned to us. Freedom allows people to make choices and be creative, so that each person can fulfil his or her role. Wherever dictatorship rules, people living under its yoke first lose their creative touch, then stagnate and ultimately sink into a low depth of humiliation and lack of self-respect. At this point, their humanity is lost, their dignity is squandered and the life they lead is unworthy of the creature God has placed in charge of the earth. Therefore, the removal of impediments to freedom is an essential task of the Muslim community as it advocates God's message and calls on people to accept and implement it. Therefore, when impediments are put in place by force, they must be removed with counterforce; if this leads to war, such a war is considered defensive, as it defends man's right to freedom.

The Prophet and his Companions remained in Makkah for thirteen years, advocating their faith in the face of brutal persecution and injustice. Throughout this period, they were instructed to refrain from using force against their persecutors. They were told to remain peaceful and to attend to their worship. This meant that, despite being at the receiving end of clear injustices, they endured whatever hardship they were faced with, while maintaining an attitude of patience and resignation. As related in Chapter 2, a major breakthrough was achieved when Islam began to spread among the people of Madinah. Scores of the new Muslims met the Prophet at Mina during the pilgrimage season, requesting that he join them in their city with all the Muslims from Makkah. They pledged their total support to him, and this included fighting against any attacking force that sought to suppress his message. They even suggested that they were ready to go to battle against the unbelievers the following day. The Prophet, however, told them that God had not permitted any fighting.

Shortly after the Prophet's immigration to Madinah, at the beginning of the fourteenth year of his message, permission to fight against oppression was given in the Qur'ān:

> Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged. Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory. These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Lord is God!" Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed. God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause. God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty. (22: 39-40)

The grounds for giving this permission are clearly stated. Fighting is permitted to the victims of injustice. As the Muslims were the ones being fought against, they were allowed to defend themselves and their freedom. Since the immigrants to Madinah were "driven from their homeland against all right" and for no reason other than faith, they were allowed to take action to counter injustice. The verses are clear in upholding the right to faith as part of man's freedom: monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques must be respected and people must be granted the freedom of worship.

During the Prophet's period of Islamic advocacy in Makkah, the Quraysh realized that they had no real grievance against the Prophet and his followers. At one stage, when matters moved towards polarization, one of their wiser chiefs, 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah, made some tempting offers to the Prophet if he were to abandon his message. The Prophet's only reply was to read him a long passage of the Qur'ān. From this, 'Utbah clearly understood that Muhammad did not care for any riches or material gains of any sort, and that his only concern was to deliver a message that clearly came from a non-human source. He went back to his people and said to them:

> I have heard something the like of which I have never heard in my life. It is neither poetry nor sorcery. Take up the suggestion I am making to you, and lay the blame for the outcome at my door. Leave this man alone. What I have heard from him will certainly bring about great events. Should the rest of the Arabs kill him, you would have been spared the trouble. If he wins, whatever glory he achieves will be yours.[1]

This is similar to the advice that 'Utbah gave the Quraysh just before the start of the Battle of Badr. In that instance, he told them that they had no real

[1] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1, pp. 313-314.

"Religious persecution is worse than killing" (2: 217) The Arabic term *fitnah* is used in both statements, but it is translated as "oppression" in one case and "religious persecution" in the other, in order to reflect the drift of the contexts in which it occurs. By making freedom the basic and most essential human right, Islam ennobles man. When freedom is denied, people are unable to exercise their humanity, and they become like machines; that is, they are even worse than animals, who act on instinct.

Islam requires the Muslim community to remove any impediment to the exercise of the right to freedom. Islam asserts that placing impediments to freedom is unjust, and requires the removal of injustice. This is part of the overall Islamic vision of humanity, our place on earth and the role God has assigned to us. Freedom allows people to make choices and be creative, so that each person can fulfil his or her role. Wherever dictatorship rules, people living under its yoke first lose their creative touch, then stagnate and ultimately sink into a low depth of humiliation and lack of self-respect. At this point, their humanity is lost, their dignity is squandered and the life they lead is unworthy of the creature God has placed in charge of the earth. Therefore, the removal of impediments to freedom is an essential task of the Muslim community as it advocates God's message and calls on people to accept and implement it. Therefore, when impediments are put in place by force, they must be removed with counterforce; if this leads to war, such a war is considered defensive, as it defends man's right to freedom.

The Prophet and his Companions remained in Makkah for thirteen years, advocating their faith in the face of brutal persecution and injustice. Throughout this period, they were instructed to refrain from using force against their persecutors. They were told to remain peaceful and to attend to their worship. This meant that, despite being at the receiving end of clear injustices, they endured whatever hardship they were faced with, while maintaining an attitude of patience and resignation. As related in Chapter 2, a major breakthrough was achieved when Islam began to spread among the people of Madinah. Scores of the new Muslims met the Prophet at Mina during the pilgrimage season, requesting that he join them in their city with all the Muslims from Makkah. They pledged their total support to him, and this included fighting against any attacking force that sought to suppress his message. They even suggested that they were ready to go to battle against the unbelievers the following day. The Prophet, however, told them that God had not permitted any fighting.

Shortly after the Prophet's immigration to Madinah, at the beginning of the fourteenth year of his message, permission to fight against oppression was given in the Qur'ān:

> Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged. Most certainly, God has the power to grant them victory. These are the ones who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, "Our Lord is God!" Were it not that God repels some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques – in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled – would surely have been destroyed. God will most certainly succour him who succours God's cause. God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty. (22: 39-40)

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grievance against Muhammad and his followers, so it would be to their greater advantage to let matters be:

> Take it from me and do not fight this man [meaning the Prophet] and his Companions. I will shoulder all the responsibility. You may put all the blame on me for this cowardice. Among these people many are our kinsfolk. Should we win, many a man among us will look around and see the killer of his father or brother. This will lead to much enmity and hostility in our ranks. You cannot kill them all before they have killed an equivalent number of you. But then the tide may turn against you. What do you seek to avenge, apart from one killed person and the caravan they have looted? I shall bear all that myself. Fellow men, if Muhammad is a liar, the wolves among the Arabs will rid you of him. If he is a king, you will benefit from the kingdom of your nephew. If, on the other hand, he is truly a Prophet you will be the happiest of all people for having him. My fellow men, do not reject my counsel or belittle my view.[2]

However, sound counsel is rarely taken at a time when people become polarized. Even today, warmongers and hardliners often carry the day when war appears imminent. The Quraysh accused ʿUtbah of cowardice, driving him to be the first to start hostilities. The Prophet would have preferred that the Quraysh see sense and realize that war would set them on a course that would bring no benefit. Shortly before ʿUtbah made his speech, the Prophet stated that he was the most sensible of them and that they would do well to listen to his advice. When sound advice is rejected, the alternative is often disastrous, and the Battle of Badr was indeed a disaster for the Quraysh. The Muslims scored a resounding victory that left the Quraysh humiliated.

Cautious Preparations

As much as he hated war, the Prophet did not shrink from conflict when it was necessary or inevitable. Indeed, when the permission to fight the unbelievers was given, he realized that preparations must be undertaken so that the Muslim community would not be caught unprepared. A few months after he and his Companions settled in Madinah, he began to send out expeditions into all surrounding areas. These expeditions consisted only of his Companions from Makkah, as the Prophet did not wish to send the people of Madinah out of

[2] Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 3, pp. 111-112.

their city. Their pledge of support was to protect the Prophet against any enemy attacking Madinah. The expeditions were given different tasks, and some of them consisted of thirty, forty or sixty riders, while others were in hundreds. Once the Prophet sent only one man, ʿAbdullāh ibn Unays, giving him the task of killing a Bedouin chief who was gathering a force to launch a raid against Madinah. ʿAbdullāh killed the man, and the raid was thus averted.

These expeditions, which went out every couple of months, served a number of purposes. They were mostly reconnaissance expeditions, as they involved no real fighting. Although some of them brought the Muslims face to face with their opponents, it was usually possible for the Prophet's Companions to avoid any flare-ups. As a result of these expeditions, the Muslims became familiar with the area around Madinah and with the tribes who lived there. They also imparted to these tribes a feeling that the Muslim community in Madinah was fully prepared for any eventuality. Many of these tribes were used to launching raids against their neighbours, but they began to feel that a raid on Madinah could be a very costly affair. Moreover, the Muslim state was able to negotiate important peace agreements with a number of the tribes who lived in between Makkah and Madinah, such as the Ḍamrah and the Mudlij tribes. These agreements emphasized the fact that Islam never tried to force itself on any individual or community. Islam always preferred to present its message and to call on people to consider it, bringing no pressure to bear on them to embrace it. This was based on the belief that people must be free to choose, and that their choice must be made on conviction. In fact, one of the early steps the Prophet took after his immigration to Madinah was to draw up the constitution for his state, known as "the Madinah document", which was signed by all groups living in Madinah: Muslims, Jews and idolaters.

These expeditions provided important training for the Muslims. In pre-Islamic days, the people of the Quraysh engaged in little fighting. The Quraysh led a prosperous life, and – unlike many other tribes at the time – they did not need to launch looting raids. No tribe in the surrounding area could attack the Quraysh, because of the sanctity of Makkah, which was recognized by all Arabs. The Muhājirūn, therefore, needed training in preparation for any armed clash that might develop in coming days. These expeditions provided such training, despite the fact that they involved little or no fighting. They also taught the Muslims discipline, which is of utmost importance for any fighting force.

Some of these expeditions aimed, ostensibly, to intercept trade caravans belonging to the Quraysh. Although little of that actually took place, this gave an impression that the route was by no means safe for such caravans. Since the Quraysh relied heavily on its trade for its prosperity, this was a serious matter.

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It must not be forgotten that when the Muslims of Makkah immigrated, they left their homes and belongings there, and the Quraysh lost no time in laying its hands on all their properties. When the Quraysh ultimately surrendered and Makkah fell to Islam, the Prophet stayed in a tent. His home, which belonged to his deceased wife, Khadījah, had been sold by his cousin, ʿAqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib. One of his Companions asked the Prophet where would he stay. He answered: "Has ʿAqīl left us anywhere to stay?" The same applied to all Muslims who had immigrated from Makkah with the Prophet. Therefore, it was legitimate for the Muslims to try to recover their losses by intercepting Quraysh's trade.

The last of these expeditions was under the command of ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh, who went on an intelligence-gathering mission into an area between Makkah and Taif. His eight-man strong expedition went very close to Makkah, but it exceeded its brief by attacking a small trade caravan, killing one of its guards, taking two prisoners and confiscating the goods. The Prophet was angry when he learnt of what had happened, because the expedition violated a well-known tradition that prohibited fighting in any of the four sacred months. This incident was exploited by the hardliners in the Quraysh to start the fighting in the Battle of Badr.

The Battle of Badr

The Battle of Badr took place in Ramadan of the second year after the Prophet's immigration to Madinah. By that time the Prophet had sent more than ten expeditions, and he had personally participated in several of these. Only the one led by ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh involved any fighting. Badr, however, was a major battle, despite the fact that only relatively small forces took part: around 1000 of the unbelievers against 313 Muslims. The smaller force scored a resounding victory, killing seventy and taking seventy prisoners for the loss of fourteen martyrs. This could only be achieved by the remarkable leadership of the Prophet. Lieutenant-General Mahmood S. Khattab, a contemporary military historian, considers him the greatest military commander of all time.[3] Khattab discusses all the battles and expeditions the Prophet fought or sent, highlighting the nature of each battle from the military perspective and sums up with a detailed discussion of the features of how the Prophet commanded his troops in order to achieve highly remarkable results.

The Prophet's military strategy depended, first and foremost, on staying ahead of his enemy, so that he could always deal with any situation. He needed

[3] Mahmood S. Khattab, *Al-Rasūl al-Qā'id* (i.e. The Prophet as a Military Commander), Beirut, 2002, p. 4.

to take this approach because he was averse to war and wanted to minimize its terrible effects. When the Prophet established his state in Madinah, it was only a city-state: like a small island in the middle of a hostile ocean. Furthermore, hostility within Madinah was also rife. The Jews refused to accept the Islamic message, despite the fact that they had only settled in Madinah in waiting for the final Prophet. Some Arabs remained as idolaters: this was a sizeable section of the Madinah population at first, but their numbers decreased as many of them began to realize the truth of Islam. As they became weaker, some of them resorted to hypocrisy, pretending to be Muslims when they were actually opposed to Islam. Their hostility was thus always covered with a thin veneer of friendship. Therefore, without forward thinking, the Muslim state could not hope to survive, let alone prosper and expand.

Proper Use of Intelligence

Intelligence is very important in any war situation. The Prophet was keenly aware of the importance of reliable intelligence, as well as the need to keep the enemy unaware of his intentions. Although the expeditions that were sent out by the Prophet managed to gather much useful intelligence and familiarize the Muslims with the area around them, it was also necessary to remain informed of events and plans taking place in Makkah. For this purpose, the Prophet relied on his uncle al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. Al-ʿAbbās stayed back in Makkah and did not join the Prophet when he immigrated. To all appearances, al-ʿAbbās continued to follow the religion of the Quraysh, which was based on idolatry. However, he maintained contact with the Prophet and kept him informed of any developments in Makkah. For example, when the Quraysh raised their army which fought the Battle of Uḥud, al-ʿAbbas hired a man from the Ghifār and gave him a letter to the Prophet giving him all the details about Quraysh's plan, their numbers and their equipment. He ensured that the man would travel at maximum speed, covering the distance between the two cities in three days, to give the Prophet ample time to prepare. Likewise, when the Quraysh and Ghaṭafān marched towards Madinah, the Prophet received information in good time, allowing him and his Companions to dig the moat to fortify Madinah.

Arguably as important as being informed of the plans and designs of the enemy is the use that a commander makes of the gathered information. When the Prophet received information that could affect the morale of his soldiers, he first made sure of its accuracy. Just before the Battle of Uḥud, the Prophet ordered al-Ḥubāb ibn al-Mundhir to go around the enemy army, assessing their strength. He told him: "Do not tell me anything when I am with anyone, unless

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they are small in number." Al-Ḥubāb went among them and was able to take stock of their strength. When he came back, the Prophet was alone. He told him: "I estimate their number at around 3000, with 200 horses. I estimate that they have 700 shields of armour." The Prophet asked him whether there were any women with them. He said: "I saw women with drums and tambourines." The Prophet said: "They are here to encourage them and remind them of the men they lost in Badr. Your estimates agree with the information I received. Do not tell anyone anything about them. We place our trust in God."[4] The Prophet thus made sure of the accuracy of the information he received initially. He did not want any of his soldiers to know that they would be fighting a force more than four times their number.

Likewise, during the siege of Madinah by the confederate tribes, the Prophet received information that the Jewish tribe of Qurayẓah had switched sides, which was in violation of their treaty with the Muslims. He sent a number of his Companions to ascertain whether that was true. He told them: "If they are bent on treachery, just give me a hint which I recognize. Do not tell the people anything that may demoralize them. If you find that they are true to the treaty, make that known to all."[5] In both these cases, the Prophet was keen to ensure that the morale of the Muslims would not be affected by any adverse news.

Perhaps the first known instance of a sealed letter given to a commander of an expedition, with instructions to not open it before the lapse of a certain period of time, was that of a letter given by the Prophet to ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh. The Prophet instructed him to travel south and to open the letter after two days. When ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh opened the letter, his instructions were that he should give his soldiers freedom of choice: whether to continue with him or to return to Madinah. ʿAbdullāh did as the Prophet instructed him and opened the letter after marching for two days. It read: "When you read this letter, proceed until you arrive at Nakhlah, between Makkah and Taif, and gather news of the Quraysh."[6]

The Element of Surprise and War Ethics

Another very important aspect of the Prophet's military strategy was the use of the element of surprise. Surprise can be used in the sense of either time, place or tactics: the Prophet used all three at various times.

When the Qurayẓah Jews discovered that the confederate tribes of Quraysh and Ghaṭafān had abandoned their siege of Madinah and left for home, they

[4] Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, Beirut, 1984, pp. 207-208.
[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 237.
[6] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 2, p. 238.

realized that they would have to face the consequences of their treachery. They expected that the Muslims would turn to them after they had time to rest, having endured a difficult siege for nearly a month. However, the Prophet allowed his Companions only a few hours rest before issuing orders for all of them to be at the forts of the Qurayẓah by sunset. That was on the same day the siege of Madinah ended. That was the last thing the Qurayẓah Jews expected. They hardly had time to lock themselves in their forts after they saw the early arrivals of the Muslim soldiers.

Likewise, when the Prophet marched at the head of his army towards Makkah, after the Quraysh had violated their peace treaty with him, he made sure that the Quraysh would have no news of his intentions. When the Prophet was a few miles from Makkah, he encamped, giving instructions to all units to light up fires at night. Having achieved his purpose of keeping the Quraysh ignorant of his plans, he now wanted them to realize that they were no match for his forces, in addition to being totally unprepared for a fight. In both cases, the timing took the enemy by surprise. They were at a loss, with no idea of how to react.

Surprise in relation to place was used in both the Muṣṭalaq and Khaybar battles. When the Prophet received information that the Muṣṭalaq were preparing to launch an attack on Madinah, he moved fast and surprised them by appearing at their doorstep when they had not completed their preparations. A short battle ensued, and the Muṣṭalaq surrendered after losing ten of their men. The Prophet did not launch a surprise attack when they were unaware. He called on them to accept a peace agreement, but they refused and thought that they could win a fight.

The Prophet marched towards Khaybar when he received information that steps were taken to forge a new alliance between the Ghaṭafān and the Jews of Khaybar to attack Madinah. He marched quickly, heading first towards the Ghaṭafān in order that the Jews of Khaybar would think that he was heading there. He then changed direction and moved quickly towards Khaybar, leaving the Ghaṭafān to think that they were safe. He marched mostly by night and was thus able to reach Khaybar at dawn. The surprise of the Khaybar Jews was so complete that they had just started to go out to attend to their farms when they saw the Muslim army. They immediately went back into their forts and locked themselves in.

The Prophet often used surprise tactics in his battles. In fact, his enemies would not know in advance how the Muslim army would be fighting. Prior to the Battle of Badr, which was the first battle fought by the Muslims, the Arabs only fought in hit and run style. In a major battle, they would attack and retreat

they are small in number." Al-Ḥubāb went among them and was able to take stock of their strength. When he came back, the Prophet was alone. He told him: "I estimate their number at around 3000, with 200 horses. I estimate that they have 700 shields of armour." The Prophet asked him whether there were any women with them. He said: "I saw women with drums and tambourines." The Prophet said: "They are here to encourage them and remind them of the men they lost in Badr. Your estimates agree with the information I received. Do not tell anyone anything about them. We place our trust in God."[4] The Prophet thus made sure of the accuracy of the information he received initially. He did not want any of his soldiers to know that they would be fighting a force more than four times their number.

Likewise, during the siege of Madinah by the confederate tribes, the Prophet received information that the Jewish tribe of Qurayẓah had switched sides, which was in violation of their treaty with the Muslims. He sent a number of his Companions to ascertain whether that was true. He told them: "If they are bent on treachery, just give me a hint which I recognize. Do not tell the people anything that may demoralize them. If you find that they are true to the treaty, make that known to all."[5] In both these cases, the Prophet was keen to ensure that the morale of the Muslims would not be affected by any adverse news.

Perhaps the first known instance of a sealed letter given to a commander of an expedition, with instructions to not open it before the lapse of a certain period of time, was that of a letter given by the Prophet to ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh. The Prophet instructed him to travel south and to open the letter after two days. When ʿAbdullāh ibn Jaḥsh opened the letter, his instructions were that he should give his soldiers freedom of choice: whether to continue with him or to return to Madinah. ʿAbdullāh did as the Prophet instructed him and opened the letter after marching for two days. It read: "When you read this letter, proceed until you arrive at Nakhlah, between Makkah and Taif, and gather news of the Quraysh."[6]

The Element of Surprise and War Ethics

Another very important aspect of the Prophet's military strategy was the use of the element of surprise. Surprise can be used in the sense of either time, place or tactics: the Prophet used all three at various times.

When the Qurayẓah Jews discovered that the confederate tribes of Quraysh and Ghaṭafān had abandoned their siege of Madinah and left for home, they

[4] Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, Beirut, 1984, pp. 207-208.
[5] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 237.
[6] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 2, p. 238.

realized that they would have to face the consequences of their treachery. They expected that the Muslims would turn to them after they had time to rest, having endured a difficult siege for nearly a month. However, the Prophet allowed his Companions only a few hours rest before issuing orders for all of them to be at the forts of the Qurayẓah by sunset. That was on the same day the siege of Madinah ended. That was the last thing the Qurayẓah Jews expected. They hardly had time to lock themselves in their forts after they saw the early arrivals of the Muslim soldiers.

Likewise, when the Prophet marched at the head of his army towards Makkah, after the Quraysh had violated their peace treaty with him, he made sure that the Quraysh would have no news of his intentions. When the Prophet was a few miles from Makkah, he encamped, giving instructions to all units to light up fires at night. Having achieved his purpose of keeping the Quraysh ignorant of his plans, he now wanted them to realize that they were no match for his forces, in addition to being totally unprepared for a fight. In both cases, the timing took the enemy by surprise. They were at a loss, with no idea of how to react.

Surprise in relation to place was used in both the Muṣṭalaq and Khaybar battles. When the Prophet received information that the Muṣṭalaq were preparing to launch an attack on Madinah, he moved fast and surprised them by appearing at their doorstep when they had not completed their preparations. A short battle ensued, and the Muṣṭalaq surrendered after losing ten of their men. The Prophet did not launch a surprise attack when they were unaware. He called on them to accept a peace agreement, but they refused and thought that they could win a fight.

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to regroup before they attacked again. At Badr, the Prophet marshalled his small force in units, each consisting of a number of lines. The advance unit were the archers and those using spears. These waited until the Quraysh attackers were close, then they showered arrows on them to cause confusion in their ranks. They also focused their aims at the chiefs of the Quraysh. When the front unit had successfully neutralized the Quraysh attack, the Prophet issued the order to the main unit, which included the bulk of the army, to move forward, fight hard and chase the retreating Quraysh army. The rear guard unit was kept ready to deal with any emergency or unforeseen development. The Quraysh army was taken by surprise at the way the Muslims fought, and it had no ready answer to it.

In the Battle of Uḥud, the surprise tactics used by the Prophet involved the stationing of a unit of archers on top of a hill to the rear of the Muslim army. They were given the express instructions to not abandon their positions for any reason, whether the Muslim army was winning or losing. As long as this unit remained in position, the Muslim army was clearly the winner. However, the archers disregarded their orders and thereby left the way open for a force of the unbelievers to attack and kill the few that remained and thus take control of the battlefield.

Perhaps the tactics that took the unbelievers by complete surprise was the digging of the dry moat across the width of the only entrance to Madinah, when the confederate tribes marched towards it with the aim of wiping out the Muslim community. The moat was too deep and too wide for their horses to cross. Therefore, they could only lay siege to Madinah. This barely weakened the Muslims, who were ultimately able to win victory.

Military history, even up to the present day, shows numerous examples wherein armies have launched attacks when their opponents were totally unaware. These armies have tried to inflict maximum damage on the enemy in an attempt to score a quick victory. This approach was never used by the Muslims during the Prophet's lifetime, or subsequently when the Muslim state went to war against the Persian and Byzantine Empires. Indeed, to launch a surprise attack would have been contrary to the Islamic ethics of war. The Prophet used the element of surprise to show the enemy that it would be unwise of them to fight. He did not use it to kill or maim enemy personnel. Islam requires the Muslims to declare war in advance and not to take the enemy unawares. The Muslim armies that swept through the two great empires in Asia and North Africa always gave the opposing force notice, offering them three options: to accept Islam and join the Muslim community as equal members and citizens; to reach a peaceful arrangement, by which they acknowledged the authority of

the Muslim state (which then became responsible for their protection in return for the payment of a protection tax, i.e. *jizyah*); or – if both options were rejected – war.

When the Prophet sent out an expedition, he always instructed his commanders not to kill anyone who was not involved in the fighting. They were told not to kill any woman, child or elderly person, or any priest or religious person. They were further instructed not to kill animals, cut trees, burn fields or do any of the atrocities that armies at war often commit. If war could not be avoided, then the Muslims were to abide by the high moral values their religion required of them.

Forestalling Enemy Moves

The Prophet was also keen to forestall any action by an enemy army that might have serious consequences to the Muslim community. When the unbelievers withdrew after the Battle of Uḥud, happy with their perceived victory, the Prophet was aware that they might have second thoughts. That would mean that they would turn around and come back for another round. He wanted to prevent that. Therefore, the following day he issued urgent orders requiring all those who took part in the Battle of Uḥud, including the wounded, to get ready for battle. No one who did not fight the previous day was allowed to join. This may sound surprising, but the Prophet did not want anyone of those who deserted the army at the bidding of ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy, the chief hypocrite, to rejoin the Muslim army, because they could not be trusted. He took his troops to Ḥamrā' al-Asad, around fourteen kilometres from Madinah, where they encamped for three days. Moreover, he asked a friend, who was an unbeliever, to catch up with the Quraysh army and dissuade them from returning for a second attack. At night, the Muslims lit up great fires to make their presence felt, so that the Quraysh would hear of them and realize that if they came back they would be facing strong opposition. This was very important, because, as the Prophet expected, the Quraysh chiefs realized that their victory was actually hollow. They thought about turning back, but the Prophet's friend counselled them that they would be risking a heavy defeat. They took his advice and left for home. Thus, the Prophet averted a second battle that could have cost many lives from both sides.

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Peace, the Preferred Option

A central aspect of the Prophet's strategy was to demonstrate that the Muslim community always preferred peace. Even from the early days of his mission, he declared that he wanted nothing other than to be allowed to advocate his message in peace. People were free to accept or reject it; but they must have the chance to make their choice freely. Had the Quraysh and others who fought him allowed him that, there would have been no war. Take, for example, his attitude after the confrontation at the moat. The confederate tribes of the Quraysh and Ghaṭafān had withdrawn after having led siege to Madinah for nearly a month. Their attempt to crush the Muslims ended in failure, and they were unlikely to raise a similar force for a new battle. The Prophet immediately realized this and said: "They will never be on the attack again, but we can attack them."

However, he had an unconventional "attack" in mind. As mentioned in Chapter 2, less than a year later, he marched at the head of 1400 men towards Makkah, armed only with their swords, which was the essential weapon for any traveller in the desert. He declared that he had no intention to fight anyone. They were on a peaceful mission, having no aim other than to worship at the Kaʿbah in Makkah. They all entered the state of consecration (*iḥrām*), which is essential for anyone going to Makkah for the pilgrimage or the *ʿUmrah* (i.e. mini-pilgrimage). The fact that they were in consecration meant that they wore *iḥrām* garments, consisting of two pieces of cloth, one to wrap themselves from the waist down and the other to throw over their shoulders. This in itself was a clear demonstration of their peaceful intentions. No one who gave a thought to the possibility of fighting would march a distance of more than 400 kilometres in such clothes.

The Quraysh, however, were adamant that they would not allow entry to the Muslims, despite the fact that the position of the Quraysh as custodians of the Kaʿbah required them to keep it open to anyone who wished to worship there. They deployed an advance force to stop the Muslims. When the Prophet heard of this, he and his Companions followed a rough, unfamiliar route to avoid the advance force and move closer to Makkah. Then they stopped at al-Ḥudaybiyah (around twenty kilometres outside Makkah). The Prophet received delegates from the Quraysh and assured them that he wanted nothing other than to worship at the Kaʿbah. He then sent a representative to negotiate a peaceful entry with the Quraysh. He also declared to his Companions that he would accept any arrangements that ensured a peaceful conclusion to the standoff, with no loss of life on either side. When the Quraysh finally accepted that they had to make a deal with him, he accepted all their conditions, which appeared to weigh heavily against the Muslims. Indeed, many of his Companions felt at the

time that the agreement was unfair to the Muslims. They did not realize until later the strategic importance of the agreement. The agreement stipulated that there would be no more war between the two sides for ten years. This meant, in effect, that the alliance between the idolater Arabs and the Jews in Arabia, which only a year earlier threatened to wipe out the Muslim community, could never be renewed. A wedge between the two old allies has been thus driven. Two months later, the Muslims were able to move against the Khaybar Jews who were trying to forge an alliance with the Ghaṭafān against the Muslim state.

More importantly, from the Prophet's point of view, was that the agreement enabled the Muslims to address other tribes, and to explain the message of Islam to them. With the anti-Islamic pressure from the Quraysh thus removed, people realized that they were free to consider the message of Islam. Muslim historians tell that anyone who had no prejudice against Islam was ready to accept it. When the Prophet and his Companions went to Makkah for their *ʿUmrah*, they numbered 1400; two years later, when the Muslims marched towards Makkah after the Quraysh violated the agreement, their army was 10,000 strong, and was the largest seen in Arabia up to that time.

Steadfast in Adversity

The calibre of a military commander is truly tested when he faces an adverse situation. In this respect, no one could ever excel the Prophet. During the siege of Madinah, when the Muslims were facing a force outnumbering them by six to one, the Prophet received the news of the Qurayẓah switching sides and joining the enemy. This exposed the Muslim defenders to the threat of a pincer attack. The Prophet's character was at its strongest at this moment. He first sought to make sure that the Qurayẓah treachery was true. Then, when it was confirmed, he reassured his Companions, making clear that their steadfastness would see them through this difficulty.

In the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslims were initially taken by surprise and they had to retreat in chaos. The Prophet remained steadfast. At one stage, only a handful of people remained with him. Yet, with this small group (which was no more than ten people according to some reports) he managed to hold the attackers, call on his supporters to rejoin him and then wrest the initiative and achieve a resounding victory.

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determined onslaught, as the highest prize for the unbelievers would be to kill Muhammad:

> At Uḥud, the Prophet's magnificent leadership was clearly apparent. He chose the battlefield which suited his purpose and forced the Quraysh to accept it. He determined the fighting strategy, choosing the point where the archers should be stationed to protect the rear of the Muslim army, ensuring that their number is sufficient for the task.
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> Important as all this is, it fades into insignificance when compared to his leadership in the second phase of the Battle of Uḥud when the vastly superior forces of the idolaters were able to surround the Muslim fighters who were largely demoralized after they had heard that the Prophet was killed. They were trying to seek refuge in the mountain nearby, away from the battlefield. Only a small band of fighters remained with the Prophet, standing up to the determined attack by the idolaters as it was gathering momentum to ensure victory.
>
> It was a very hard situation as far as the Muslims were concerned, while the unbelievers held great advantage. Yet the Prophet was able to bring a very desperate situation under control. He managed to lead those Muslims who remained with him, breaking through the enemy fighters, and rising to a relatively high position. He then reorganized those troops who rejoined them, boosting their morale and renewing their self confidence. They were then able to repel Quraysh's renewed attacks. Thus he reversed the situation, changing the imminent defeat into a triumph. The Quraysh felt that wiping out the Muslim army was within its grasp, but the Prophet's leadership turned the scales against them and they soon despaired of attaining that goal. He then forced them to withdraw from the battlefield.
>
> He went further than that, marching with his troops on the second day to chase the unbelievers. The unbelievers had to resort to trickery, sending false information about returning to attack Madinah. The Prophet took that threat seriously, preparing to meet the unbelievers in battle again if they reappeared.
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> This is a superior standard of military leadership. One of its fruits was that the real victory belonged to the Muslims who initially suffered a reversal. I read extensively about the military history of most nations and I have not come across a situation that came close to the very desperate situation the Muslims were in during the Battle of Uḥud, yet the Prophet was able to deal with this situation, saving his troops from being wiped out, boosting their morale and renewing their self confidence in a remarkably very short period of time.[7]

Morale and Organization

The Prophet was fully aware that morale was always a very important factor in the outcome of any battle. His was an army composed of believers who defended their faith and their freedom of belief. Thus, their motivation could not be stronger. The concept of martyrdom is very important in the Islamic faith, as martyrs are witnesses to the truth of Islam, laying down their lives to defend it. God accepts martyrs and rewards them with admission into heaven. Muslims always look at life on earth as an initial stage to everlasting life in the Hereafter, and are always prepared to give their all for the cause, knowing that martyrdom will ensure them a place in heaven. The Prophet nevertheless sought always to raise the morale of his soldiers by achieving great successes. One of his methods was to organize his troops into units, so that they would know each other and fight as a well-knit team. When he marched to take Makkah in year eight, his army was organized in a way that grouped the fighters from each tribe in a single unit. In a close fight, everyone would show maximum courage in front of his own tribesmen.

Conversely, the Prophet's tactics often demoralized the enemy. The element of surprise was very effective in this regard. Additional demoralizing factors were often used. When Abū Sufyān, the leader of Makkah, was about to leave the Muslim camp in order to warn his people of the Muslims' arrival, the Prophet asked his uncle al-ʿAbbās to stay with Abū Sufyān at the exit from the place where the Muslim army was encamped. He wanted him to see the whole of the army as it moved out, heading towards Makkah. When Abū Sufyān saw that, he hurried to Makkah and warned his people, telling them: "Muhammad is at your doorstep with forces that you cannot resist. Whoever enters my home or stays in the Mosque or stays in his own home with his door shut is safe."[8] This ensured that Makkah fell to Islam with very little fighting.

Yet, when the battle was over and there was no more threat of armed conflict, the Prophet wanted his enemy to consider Islam on its merits. Therefore, he was

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[7] Mahmood S. Khattab, *Al-Rasūl al-Qā'id*, pp. 189-191.

[8] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 23.

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Morale and Organization

The Prophet was fully aware that morale was always a very important factor in the outcome of any battle. His was an army composed of believers who defended their faith and their freedom of belief. Thus, their motivation could not be stronger. The concept of martyrdom is very important in the Islamic faith, as martyrs are witnesses to the truth of Islam, laying down their lives to defend it. God accepts martyrs and rewards them with admission into heaven. Muslims always look at life on earth as an initial stage to everlasting life in the Hereafter, and are always prepared to give their all for the cause, knowing that martyrdom will ensure them a place in heaven. The Prophet nevertheless sought always to raise the morale of his soldiers by achieving great successes. One of his methods was to organize his troops into units, so that they would know each other and fight as a well-knit team. When he marched to take Makkah in year eight, his army was organized in a way that grouped the fighters from each tribe in a single unit. In a close fight, everyone would show maximum courage in front of his own tribesmen.

Conversely, the Prophet's tactics often demoralized the enemy. The element of surprise was very effective in this regard. Additional demoralizing factors were often used. When Abū Sufyān, the leader of Makkah, was about to leave the Muslim camp in order to warn his people of the Muslims' arrival, the Prophet asked his uncle al-ʿAbbās to stay with Abū Sufyān at the exit from the place where the Muslim army was encamped. He wanted him to see the whole of the army as it moved out, heading towards Makkah. When Abū Sufyān saw that, he hurried to Makkah and warned his people, telling them: "Muhammad is at your doorstep with forces that you cannot resist. Whoever enters my home or stays in the Mosque or stays in his own home with his door shut is safe."[8] This ensured that Makkah fell to Islam with very little fighting.

Yet, when the battle was over and there was no more threat of armed conflict, the Prophet wanted his enemy to consider Islam on its merits. Therefore, he was

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[7] Mahmood S. Khattab, *Al-Rasūl al-Qā'id*, pp. 189-191.
[8] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 23.

very magnanimous in victory. This is best seen when he took over Makkah. Notably, the Prophet stayed only a short while in Makkah after he achieved this victory. Nevertheless, within a few months the majority of its population accepted Islam. This was the direct result of the Prophet's treatment of its people when he was its absolute master. He never lost sight of his primary role as God's Messenger and as an advocate of the Divine faith. Conquest of land and city meant nothing to him; his was a conquest of hearts. His victory was winning people's hearts to his cause.

Total Mobilization

The expedition to Tabūk was the last one to be led by the Prophet, but it was extremely significant from a military point of view. The declared aim of this expedition was to fight the Byzantine Empire, which was held in awe by all Arabs. Indeed, the very thought of fighting the Byzantines was very remote from their minds before the Muslim state came into existence. New dimensions of the Prophet's military leadership were seen in this expedition. This was a most difficult exercise for the Muslim community. It occurred during mid-summer, when travelling in the desert was very difficult, considering the heat and the desert terrain. The distance between Madinah and Tabūk was around 700 kilometres. Moreover, the economy of the Muslim state could hardly support a middle size expedition, let alone such a major one. The Prophet's army in this expedition was the largest ever seen in Arabia at 30,000 strong.

The Prophet ordered full mobilization of the entire Muslim nation. The mobilization included all the people who were able to travel and all the resources that could be provided to ensure that those who were without means of transport could have their camels. This was an entirely new exercise, and one that tested the community. Only the hypocrites failed. There was no battle at Tabūk, however, as the Byzantine army was not there. Nevertheless, the expedition provided very intense training for the Muslim community. This was reflected in many aspects, including the fact that when an individual dropped behind the marching army, he was left to his own devices. The Prophet stated that such individuals would receive God's help if they were true believers. The Prophet wanted to ensure that the army reached its destination in good shape. Therefore, they marched at night, taking its rest during the day, because that approach better preserved their energy.

The Prophet encamped at Tabūk for some time, giving his troops rest, which they clearly needed. However, he was able to communicate with the tribes living

in northern Arabia, and he concluded treaties with them that ensured they were allied to the Muslim state. The Muslims realized that with such alliances they could stand up to the pressures the Byzantines might seek to bring to bear against them. By the time the expedition ended and the Muslims were back in Madinah and their other areas, they became convinced that they could fight the Byzantines, should this become necessary. They also had the advantage of having allies in the area next to the Byzantine borders.

The expedition of Tabūk illustrated the importance of intelligence. The idea for this expedition started on the basis of intelligence received from traders from southern Syria, who had informed the Muslims in Madinah that the Byzantines were raising forces to attack Arabia. This meant that the Prophet had his intelligence sources keeping him informed of what was happening in neighbouring countries. Likewise, the Byzantines were keeping an eye on developments in the Muslim state. After the Muslim army returned, the hypocrites who stayed behind offered their false excuses for not joining the expedition. There were also three people who stayed behind and who were true believers, despite the fact that they were able to join. They offered no excuse for their failure, and the Prophet left their affair to God to rule on. Pending God's ruling, they were boycotted by the Muslim community. One of them received a message from the governor of Syria under the Byzantine Emperor: it told him that his case was known and that he would be welcome to join them.[9]

No Permanent Hostility

Looking at the overall military aspect during the Prophet's lifetime, we find that he led his army on twenty-eight occasions during a period of less than eight years. However, nineteen of these occasions required no fighting and produced no casualties, as the enemy would run away when they learnt of the impending arrival of the Muslims. The nine occasions that involved fighting were Badr, Uḥud, al-Muṣṭalaq, the Moat, Qurayẓah, Khaybar, Makkah, Ḥunayn and Taif. They all ended in victory for the Muslims, except Uḥud, even though some military experts give the victory at Uḥud to the Muslims, despite the heavy reversal. The total number of casualties in these battles, however, was very small. The higher figures of Muslim martyrs stand at a total of 274, while the total of enemy losses was around 300 killed. These low figures were due, in large

[9] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, pp. 187-189.

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measure, to the unique leadership of the Prophet and his tactics that ensured the achievement of victory with minimum losses to both sides. He knew that today's enemies could be tomorrow's friends. He wanted no ongoing hostility because his message was addressed to all.

CHAPTER 16

TO WIN THE ENEMY'S HEART

THE FIRST FOURTEEN YEARS of the Islamic message were free from military engagement with any enemy. Throughout the Prophet's stay in Makkah, which lasted thirteen years after he began to receive God's message, the Muslims were expressly commanded to not resort to any fighting, regardless of the pressures and the physical abuse they were subjected to.[1] Around the time when the Prophet immigrated to Madinah, permission to fight aggressors was given to the Muslims. The Prophet sent out expeditions into the area around Madinah, but these were largely peaceful. These served as good training for the Muslims and deterred would-be raiders from trying to attack Madinah. The Quraysh party purposefully drove the situation into the first military confrontation.

The Prophet's attitude to war was consistent with his pursuit of right. He considered that it was the right of the Muslim community to live and practise its religion in peace. He also believed that it was the right of every individual to choose their beliefs and to live according to their faith. Therefore, he considered that resorting to force in order to turn people away from their faith was contrary to what is right. He well understood that his mission was an act of grace God bestowed on humanity. Therefore, he held back from war except when it was forced on him by the enemy.

Apart from the defeat at the Battle of Uḥud and the treacherous killing of his Companions at al-Raji' and Bi'r Ma'ūnah, the Prophet won all military encounters. Insight into the teaching of the Prophet can be gained from investigating the way he dealt with defeated enemies.

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The first thing to be observed about the Prophet's victories is that he never chased a defeated army that started to withdraw. He let his enemies leave without them fearing a rearguard attack. He was never out to cause a crushing defeat; he only wanted the Muslim community to be able to live in peace and to advocate its message in peace. Those defeated enemies, whoever they happened to be, were, in fact, addressed by the Divine message he advocated. The Prophet, therefore, decided that they should be given a chance to return home and reflect on their attitude, as they may reconsider their position and accept Islam. When he had seventy prisoners of war, after the Battle of Badr, the first thing the Prophet said to his Companions was an order to treat the prisoners well. His followers were exemplary in their obedience. When he consulted his Companions regarding the prisoners and what to do with them, a sizeable section of the Muslim community wanted them all killed, in order to weaken the enemy and demonstrate the finality of their break with the unbelievers. The Prophet, however, chose to accept ransom in return for letting them go free. Those of them who were literate could buy their freedom by teaching ten Muslim children to read and write.

In Chapter 13, I discussed the case of the Muṣṭalaq tribe, who were preparing to attack Madinah, although they had no cause to do so. The encounter resulted in many of their men and women being taken prisoners, which meant that they would either be enslaved or would have to buy their freedom. The Prophet married one of their women, Juwayriyyah, making her a "mother of the believers." The result was that all their men and women were set free for no ransom as the Muslims felt that they could not hold the Prophet's in-laws in captivity.

The situation in Madinah was by no means easy at the time. Resources were scarce and the influx of the Muslims who immigrated from Makkah constituted a burden on the economy of the fledgling Muslim state. In addition, the fact that they had to fight several battles in a short period of time made things far from settled in Madinah. The ransom that they would have taken from more than 100 prisoners of war would have considerably eased the economic hardship they were suffering. Yet, the Prophet looked at the wider picture. He wanted the hostility of the Muṣṭalaq to be replaced by friendship, so that they could look at Islam in an objective way, unmarred by any residue of the feelings of the defeat they had suffered: that would constitute a much better gain for Islam. Indeed, the Prophet's view was expressed in his statement: "If God makes you the means of one person following His guidance, that is better for you than everything under the sun."

The way in which the Prophet dealt with the chief of the Muṣṭalaq epitomizes his attitude. The Prophet ensured that al-Hārith ibn Abī Ḍirār recognized the

truth of Islam. The Prophet further acted in a way that led to the freeing of all captives of the war with al-Muṣṭalaq. Al-Ḥārith took the right measure and embraced Islam, together with a significant number of his tribesmen.

Freeing All Captives

The Battle of Ḥunayn took place towards the end of the eighth year of the Islamic calendar, shortly after Makkah had fallen to Islam with very little fighting. The Prophet's victory in Makkah prompted the people of Hawāzin, a very large tribe that still held on to idolatry, to group with another major tribe, the Thaqīf, in a final attempt to crush Islam and the Muslims. However, the chief of Hawāzin, Mālik ibn ʿAwf, decided on a total mobilization, bringing with his army all their women and children as well as their cattle. He thought that when his men realized that a defeat would mean an absolute loss of everything they had, they would fight hard and remain steadfast to the end until they had achieved victory. Despite sound advice to the contrary, he went on to fight, placing the women and children in the rear. The battle resulted in a crushing defeat for the Hawāzin, while the Thaqīf remained in their fortified city of Taif. The Muslims took all the Hawāzin women and children prisoners and all their cattle and money as booty.

The Islamic rule with regard to war gains is that twenty percent goes to the state and eighty percent is divided equally among the army. In this instance, the gains included 24,000 camels, 40,000 sheep and 4000 ounces of silver, in addition to 6000 prisoners of war. This was the largest set of war gains the Muslims had ever made. Therefore, there was much pressure on the Prophet to divide these gains, as everyone wanted to be sure of their shares. The Prophet, however, wanted something different. The real gain would be to end the hostility of the Hawāzin and to encourage them to consider joining the ranks of Muslims. Therefore, he delayed dividing the war gains. The Prophet's thoughts were with the Hawāzin who had lost everything. Yet, it was not up to him to determine what to do with the war gains. He had full authority over one-fifth of these gains, but that would not give a satisfactory solution, considering that he had other areas to attend to that required a considerable portion of that one-fifth.

Ultimately, the Hawāzin came forward to the Prophet and appealed to him, urging compassion:

> Messenger of God, we are your people and your own clan. You know the sort of disaster which has befallen us. We appeal to you to show mercy to us, may God bestow His grace on you. Their spokesman said to the

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Prophet: "Messenger of God, those women who have fallen captive to you include some who are your aunts and some who were your wet nurses when you were young. Had we been in such a relationship with the king of Ghassān in Syria or the King of al-Manādhirah in Iraq, and had this sort of disaster befallen us at their hands, we would still have hoped that they would show leniency towards us. You, God's Messenger, are the best to return kindness."[2]

The reference to the Prophet's aunts from the Hawāzin is a reference to the fact that, as an infant, the Prophet was looked after by Ḥalīmah, a wet nurse from Saʿd, a clan of the Hawāzin. The Prophet told them that he had already waited more than two weeks for them to come forward. He explained that the war gains belong in the large part to the fighters. He urged them to adopt Islam and make that known to the Muslims. He taught them what to say in order to make an appeal to the Muslim community. He also told them that they had to choose either their women and children, or their property. They could not have both. They chose to have their women and children returned to them.

The following day, after *Ẓuhr* prayer, they did as the Prophet instructed them. They stood up and appealed to the Prophet and to the Muslims in general. The Prophet answered them, urging the Muslims to be kind to them. He then said that whatever he and his clan (the Hāshimites) had was to be returned to the Hawāzin. The Muhājirūn and the Anṣār immediately responded, saying that they gave up their shares to God's Messenger. The Prophet told everyone that whoever was willing to relinquish their share will be rewarded by God, although no one was forced to do so. A small number insisted on keeping their shares, and the Prophet compensated them handsomely in return for giving up the women and children. Thus, the Hawāzin captives of war were all released.

Another aspect of the way the Prophet dealt with the vanquished was the way he won over the Hawāzin leader. Mālik ibn ʿAwf was only thirty years of age when he led his people to their disastrous battle with the Muslims. He was a promising young man with courage and intelligence, but he was misguided and unwilling to listen to advice. When the situation went against him in the battle and he saw defeat looking him in the eye, he fled and went to Taif where he joined the Thaqīf, perhaps hoping to do better in a future encounter. The Prophet, however, told the elders of the Hawāzin: "Inform Mālik that if he comes to me and declares himself a Muslim I will give him back his family and property and I will add 100 camels." When Mālik received this message,

[2] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 134.

he realized that his best course of action was to go to the Prophet and make his peace with him. He needed to sneak out of Taif, fearing that his hosts would detain him should they hear of his intention. He caught up with the Prophet as he was heading to Makkah. The Prophet reunited him with his family, gave him back all that belonged to him and 100 camels. We should remember here, that to the Arabs at the time wealth was estimated by the number of camels and cattle people had: one she-camel was very valuable because of the great amount of milk it produced. The Prophet also appointed Mālik as leader of the Muslims among his people. He became a sincere soldier of Islam. This was the mark of the Prophet's way of dealing with former adversaries: he sought to win them over to Islam. As a result, many responded and found him true to his word. That was sufficient for them to consolidate their conversion to Islam. The more they read of the Qur'ān and learnt the principles and values of Islam the better Muslims they became.

Love in Place of Hostility

The greatest example of how the Prophet dealt with the vanquished was the way he treated the Quraysh when Makkah fell to Islam. The Quraysh were his people, but they were the ones who opposed him from the first day of his mission. He had extended a hand of love and friendship to them, but they had consistently responded with hatred and hostility. They drove him, with his followers, out of their hometown. They went on the warpath when he established his state in Madinah, and tried time after time to crush the Muslims, sending armies to fight against them and joining forces with other major tribes, like the Ghaṭafān and the Jews. When the Muslims signed a peace agreement with the Quraysh, the latter violated it and helped to kill the Prophet's allies in a treacherous attack. They had thus forfeited all rights to any generous treatment. They had to pay for their treachery: what sort of price did the Prophet exact?

First of all, when the Prophet ordered mobilization, he maintained maximum secrecy so that the Quraysh would not hear of his intention to march towards them. He wanted to use the element of surprise to maximum advantage. When he arrived close to Makkah, he encamped there, changing his strategy from secrecy to maximum publicity, instructing everyone in the army to light up a night fire. This worked out beautifully, making the chiefs of the Quraysh who saw these fires realize that no matter what resistance they could put up, they would be no match for the Muslims. He then declared that whoever went into the Grand Mosque of the Kaʿbah, or stayed with Abū Sufyān, the chief of the Quraysh, or stayed indoors would be safe. Thus, what anyone needed to do to

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[2] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 134.

he realized that his best course of action was to go to the Prophet and make his peace with him. He needed to sneak out of Taif, fearing that his hosts would detain him should they hear of his intention. He caught up with the Prophet as he was heading to Makkah. The Prophet reunited him with his family, gave him back all that belonged to him and 100 camels. We should remember here, that to the Arabs at the time wealth was estimated by the number of camels and cattle people had: one she-camel was very valuable because of the great amount of milk it produced. The Prophet also appointed Mālik as leader of the Muslims among his people. He became a sincere soldier of Islam. This was the mark of the Prophet's way of dealing with former adversaries: he sought to win them over to Islam. As a result, many responded and found him true to his word. That was sufficient for them to consolidate their conversion to Islam. The more they read of the Qur'ān and learnt the principles and values of Islam the better Muslims they became.

Love in Place of Hostility

The greatest example of how the Prophet dealt with the vanquished was the way he treated the Quraysh when Makkah fell to Islam. The Quraysh were his people, but they were the ones who opposed him from the first day of his mission. He had extended a hand of love and friendship to them, but they had consistently responded with hatred and hostility. They drove him, with his followers, out of their hometown. They went on the warpath when he established his state in Madinah, and tried time after time to crush the Muslims, sending armies to fight against them and joining forces with other major tribes, like the Ghaṭafān and the Jews. When the Muslims signed a peace agreement with the Quraysh, the latter violated it and helped to kill the Prophet's allies in a treacherous attack. They had thus forfeited all rights to any generous treatment. They had to pay for their treachery: what sort of price did the Prophet exact?

First of all, when the Prophet ordered mobilization, he maintained maximum secrecy so that the Quraysh would not hear of his intention to march towards them. He wanted to use the element of surprise to maximum advantage. When he arrived close to Makkah, he encamped there, changing his strategy from secrecy to maximum publicity, instructing everyone in the army to light up a night fire. This worked out beautifully, making the chiefs of the Quraysh who saw these fires realize that no matter what resistance they could put up, they would be no match for the Muslims. He then declared that whoever went into the Grand Mosque of the Kaʿbah, or stayed with Abū Sufyān, the chief of the Quraysh, or stayed indoors would be safe. Thus, what anyone needed to do to

ensure their safety was to stay indoors. His army then went into the city from its four directions, under strict instructions not to start any fighting unless they were attacked.

The Prophet himself went into Makkah, the capital of Arabia and the bastion of idolatry, and the city that had driven him out only eight years earlier, with his head lowered so that it almost touched the back of his camel, in acknowledgement of God's grace. He started by offering worship at the Kaʿbah. The following day, when the people of Makkah gathered to listen to his speech, he offered them a bright future. He asked them: "What do you think I will do to you?" They had asked the same question to themselves: What would this commander who conquered their city and brought them into full submission do to them? They were aware of what they did to him and his followers over a period of twenty-one years of hostility and war, so what could they expect? Their answer reflected what they knew of his character, when they said: "We expect only goodness from you. You are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother." He replied: "You may all go free."

Such nobility and magnanimity is unheard of in military conquests throughout the history of humanity. However, this conqueror was exceptional. His was a conquest of hearts, not land. Thus Makkah was won for Islam. Within a few days, its population started to come over to him, declaring themselves Muslims. No coercion or pressure was used against anyone. They were left to think of Islam in an objective way that was undistorted by hostility or thoughts of revenge for their earlier defeats. Even those of them who held privileges or honourable functions were allowed to retain them. The Prophet could have taken these away from them and given them to his own people, but he would not do anything of the sort. Instead, he declared: "This is a day of honesty, when promises are honoured."[3]

[3] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 4, p. 32.

CHAPTER 17

THE PROPHET'S DEALINGS WITH THE JEWS

THE PROPHET'S IMMIGRATION from Makkah to Yathrib (which came to be known as Madinah)[1] established the first Islamic state. This was a city-state with potential to expand. However, the society that existed in Madinah was fundamentally different from the one that the Prophet and his Companions had left back in Makkah.

Makkah was a homogenous society, as the tribe of Quraysh provided most of the population. They had their slaves and other individuals who were attached to the tribe, but who did not belong to it (they called these their *allies*), who provided manual services. The Quraysh depended on trade for their living. They were skilled in international trade, and often organized business trips to Syria and Yemen. This was a flourishing business that brought the people of Makkah wealth and a comfortable life.

By contrast, Madinah was a very complex society. The Arab population consisted of two main tribes: the Aws and the Khazraj. Both originated from Yemen and had the same roots, but they were often in conflict, and the battles fought between them had weakened them both. In addition, there was a large Jewish community in Madinah. This consisted of several tribes, the most important of which were the Qaynuqāʿ, the Naḍīr and the Qurayẓah. Each could mobilize a force of 700-800 fighters. The Jews lived in forts to the south-east of Madinah. These three tribes forged alliances with either the Aws or the Khazraj, and would stir trouble between them. When a battle erupted, the Jews might fight alongside their Arab allies against their fellow Jews. The economy of

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Madinah depended on agriculture, with date farms extending over a wide area. Both Arabs and Jews depended mainly on these for their living, but before the Prophet's immigration, the Qaynuqāʿ Jews had been driven out of their area by the other two Jewish tribes and had moved into Madinah. They had their own marketplace, where they were engaged in trade and handicraft. There were jewellers among them.

By the time the Prophet and his Companions from Makkah, the Muhājirūn, started their immigration, a considerable section of its Arab population from both the Aws and the Khazraj had adopted Islam. However, a sizeable number of these were still idolaters: it is difficult to estimate the percentage of idolaters among the Arab population at the time when the Prophet arrived in Madinah, but that percentage was always on the decrease. Greater numbers of Arabs embraced Islam as they saw their tribesmen, neighbours and members of their own families adapting their lives to the high values taught by the Prophet. This meant that there were three different religions living side by side in Madinah, which was, by our modern standards, a small city. The same population also belonged to different ethnic groups, with the Arabs from Makkah belonging to the ʿAdnānī branch of Arabs and the Arabs of Madinah belonging to the Qaḥṭānī branch. The Jews were skilled in trade and business, while the Arabs of Madinah depended solely on agriculture. The Muhājirūn from Makkah were also involved, and many of these were clever businessmen.

This was, therefore, a very complex new situation within a limited geographical area. There was also the added complexity of the external threat. The Quraysh in Makkah, which was a force to be reckoned with, was very unhappy about the immigration of the Muslims to Madinah. While the Muslims were in Makkah, the Quraysh felt that they had the situation under control. Now that Islam had its own base and could operate freely, the Quraysh sensed a danger to its position of supremacy in Arabia and a danger to its international trade.

Shortly after settling down in Madinah, the Prophet sought to organize the new society. He took four very important measures. Firstly, he built the mosque, which served as a place of worship, a centre to discuss the affairs of the Muslim community and a venue to conduct consultations on any serious matter. This also served as a place where the Muslims could be educated in their faith. Secondly, he established a bond of brotherhood between the Muslims, with one of the Muhājirūn becoming a special brother of one of the Anṣār (the Muslims from Madinah). Thirdly, he sent out groups of his Companions in military expeditions to demonstrate that the new state was ready for any eventuality. As noted previously, these did not involve any military clashes, except for a small

group of eight men when one man from the Quraysh was killed. Fourthly, the Prophet regulated the relations between the different sections of the population of Madinah. A covenant was drawn up defining the responsibilities of every group within the Muslim community and outlining the nature of its relations with the Jews.[2] The document was perhaps the first written constitution ever produced anywhere in the world, and it provided for a pluralist society. Here are some of its provisions that reflect its pluralist nature:

> The Muhājirūn of the Quraysh bear responsibility for the blood money they incur.[3] They pay for the release of those taken prisoner from among them, according to what is reasonable and fair among believers. The ʿAwf clan remain the same, bearing responsibility for the blood money they incur. Every group pays for the release of its prisoners, in accordance with what is reasonable and fair among believers.
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> The God-fearing believers stand against any one among their number who transgresses or is guilty of oppression or indulges in an act of sin or aggression or corruption among the believers. They shall stand together against him even though he may be the son of any one of them...
>
> The least distinguished among the believers may offer a pledge of protection which is binding on all of them. Believers are one another's allies against all people. Anyone from among the Jews who joins us shall have our support and equal rights with us, suffering no oppression and fearing no alliance against them. Believers shall have a single pledge of peace... Every group which joins us in an expedition of jihad shall carry its own numbers. The believers are equal with regard to sacrificing their lives for God's cause...
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> No non-believer shall extend protection to any property or any person belonging to the Quraysh, nor shall he stand between them and any believer. Anyone who kills a believer and is proven guilty shall be taken in retaliation, unless the victim's next of kin forgoes his right. All the believers shall unite against the killer and it shall not be lawful for them to do anything other than bring him to justice.

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No believer who accepts this treaty and believes in God and the Last Day may give support or shelter to any criminal... On whatever you may differ, the final verdict rests with God and with Muḥammad (peace be upon him).

The Jews shall share expenses with the believers as long as they are at war [with others]. The Jewish allies of the ʿAwf clan stand as one community with the believers. The Jews have their own religion and the Muslims have their own. This applies to them and their allies. Anyone who is guilty of oppression or commits a sin only brings himself and his household to ruin. The Jewish allies of the clans of Al-Najjār, Al-Ḥārith, Sāʿidah, Jusham, Al-Aws and Thaʿlabah enjoy the same rights as the Jewish allies of ʿAwf. Anyone who commits injustice or a sin only brings himself and his household to ruin...

The Jews shall bear their expenses and the Muslims shall bear theirs. They are required to render support against anyone who fights any party to this agreement. They owe it to each other to give sincere counsel...

Nothing that belongs to the Quraysh or to those who support it shall be protected. The parties to this agreement shall support each other against anyone who attacks Yathrib. If they are called upon to enter into any peace agreement, then they will do so. If they are invited to something like that, then the believers are required to support it, except with those who fight to suppress the faith. Every group shall bear its share of responsibility in the part closest to them. The Jewish allies of Al-Aws, their own people and their allies, have the same rights and obligations as the parties to this agreement, and this shall be sincerely honoured by the parties to this agreement... Everyone shall bear the responsibility for whatever action he perpetrates. God approves the best and most truthful of what this agreement contains. This agreement does not give immunity from punishment to anyone guilty of oppression or sin. He who leaves Madinah shall be safe and he who stays shall be safe unless he is guilty of injustice or sin. God is the protector of those who fulfil their pledges and are God-fearing, and so is Muḥammad, God's Messenger.

This pluralist society could have lived in peace within its area for a long time, but that was not to be. The nature of the different groups helped to undermine this effort to establish a society where all groups lived in peace and mutual respect. The history of Madinah (as Yathrib) before the advent of Islam

tells us that when rivalry between its Arab and Jewish communities heightened: the Jews threatened the Arabs, telling them of an impending appearance of a Prophet "whom we shall follow and will then be able to crush you to the last man." The six men from Yathrib who were the first to meet the Prophet in Makkah and listen to him as he explained his message to them said to each other: "This is the Prophet the Jews have been telling you about. Let them not flock to him ahead of you."

A rivalry might have been expected to arise between the Arabs of Madinah and the Jews, as each community would compete to take the Prophet to their side. The Jews, however, chose to stand away from the Prophet. Their rabbis took mostly a hostile attitude to him and his message, although a couple of them soon established the truth of his message and declared their acceptance of Islam. Several others recognized him as God's Messenger soon after his arrival, but nevertheless refused to publicly acknowledge that they knew. Others, like Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, took a very hostile attitude and said they would never believe in him. The Prophet, however, never pressured anyone to accept his message, as he wanted people to accept it only if they were convinced of its truth. He was willing to let the Jews determine their position as they wished. He only wanted them to abide by the covenant they signed with him, which gave everyone in Madinah the opportunity to live in peace and follow their faith.

The Surfacing of a Hidden Hostility

The events that occurred over the next few years showed that those Jews were never happy to follow a policy of neighbourly coexistence. They wanted to retain their position, but realized that Islam was bound to spread and therefore represented a serious danger to them. When the Muslims achieved a resounding victory in the Battle of Badr, their first major encounter with the Quraysh, the Jews of Madinah were very sympathetic about the Quraysh's defeat. Some of them even travelled to Makkah to offer condolences to the Quraysh on the loss of several of its chiefs. Some ridiculed the victory the Muslims achieved and told them that it was hollow, stressing that the Muslims would meet a different result should they fight the Jews. The Qaynuqāʿ Jews even went further, disgracing a Muslim woman in their market place, which led to a clash in which one Jew and one Muslim were killed.

The latter event was a clear violation of the covenant they had signed with the Prophet. He, therefore, set siege to the Qaynuqāʿ Jews. The siege lasted fifteen days, but there was no fighting. Ultimately, they agreed to evacuate Madinah, leaving their property behind. The Prophet gave them three days to prepare

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themselves for departure. He even appointed their ally, ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, to supervise their departure. ʿUbādah was a close friend to them, but he was a good Muslim. His appointment was made to ensure that they would not be harmed by anyone when they left. They headed to an area which is today in southern Syria.[4]

What happened to the Qaynuqāʿ should have served as a warning to the rest of the Jews in Madinah, making clear that the Prophet and the Muslims would not accept any hostility from anyone. If the Jews could abide by the terms of the covenant, they would live in peace with the Muslims; but any violation of the covenant would lead to grave consequences.

An Assassination Attempt

The Naḍīr tribe was headed by Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, their chief rabbi. Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab reportedly recognized the Prophet when the latter arrived in Madinah, and confirmed that he was God's Messenger. Nevertheless, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab declared that he would remain an enemy to the Prophet to his last day.[5] He was certainly true to his word. Yet this enmity had no reason other than the fact that Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not belong to the Jews. It seems as if it reflected a quarrel with God Himself for having chosen a non-Jew to be His final Messenger, when "God knows best whom to entrust with His message." (6: 124)

After the defeat the Muslims suffered at the Battle of Uḥud in the third year of the Hijri calendar, and the two treacherous attacks on their people at al-Rajīʿ and Bi'r Maʿūnah, the internal enemy (represented by the hypocrites and the Jews) became confident and were more open in their hostility. Therefore, the Prophet wanted to test the degree of commitment the Jews felt toward the covenant they had with him. He went to al-Naḍīr's quarters with a few of his Companions, requesting help with raising the blood money required to be paid by the Muslims for two men who were accidentally killed. The chiefs of al-Naḍīr said to the Prophet that they would go about raising the money, but they plotted to assassinate him by dropping a rock from a rooftop over his head. The Prophet was informed by the angel of the plot and he left immediately.[6]

The Prophet sent them a message telling them that because of their treachery, they were required to leave Madinah within ten days. They would retain their

[4] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, pp. 427-428. See also, al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 178.
[5] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 2, p. 139.
[6] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 3, p. 191.

properties and appoint agents to look after their farms. They agreed to this at first, but then ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubayy, the chief of the hypocrites (those who pretended to be Muslims but, in reality, were not), sent them a message telling them that he was ready to support them with 2000 fighters if they rejected Muhammad's offer. Against the advice of some of their more learned rabbis, they sent the Prophet a message stating that they would not leave, come what may. In response, the Prophet laid siege to their quarters, and the support they had anticipated failed to materialize. After enduring the siege, lasting for a number of days, they requested the Prophet to let them leave on the conditions he first offered. The Prophet told them that they would have to relinquish most of their property: they were allowed only a camel-load each of their belongings. They agreed to this and were allowed to leave.

Had the Naḍīr remained true to their covenant with the Prophet they would not have suffered any harm. They would have continued to live in Madinah in peace and in co-operation with the Muslims: it was their treachery that caused them trouble. Earlier (shortly after the Prophet had left their quarters and they were preparing to kill him), a very learned rabbi of theirs, Kinānah ibn Ṣuwayrā', had told them that he knew the reason for the Prophet's departure. He added:

> Do not deceive yourselves. By God, he is the last Prophet. You hoped that the last Prophet would be a descendent of Aaron, but God chose the one He wanted. What we read in our books and in the Torah that has not been altered clearly says that the last Messenger would be born in Makkah and would immigrate to Yathrib. The description given in the Torah applies to him to the letter.[7]

He went on to advise them to either accept Islam or to accept the offer the Prophet would be sending them to leave and retain their properties. He added that the first was the better option. They, however, rejected his advice and followed Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab.

The Prophet's treatment of al-Naḍīr was mild by any standards. Few heads of state who had overcome those who plotted to assassinate them would just allow them to leave in peace without at least seizing those behind the plot and throwing them in jail, if not killing them outright. To allow them to leave, so that they would be free to have another attempt to move against him – and this actually happened – might have seemed too lenient. Yet, the Prophet never

[7] Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, Beirut, 1984, p. 365.

themselves for departure. He even appointed their ally, ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, to supervise their departure. ʿUbādah was a close friend to them, but he was a good Muslim. His appointment was made to ensure that they would not be harmed by anyone when they left. They headed to an area which is today in southern Syria.[4]

What happened to the Qaynuqāʿ should have served as a warning to the rest of the Jews in Madinah, making clear that the Prophet and the Muslims would not accept any hostility from anyone. If the Jews could abide by the terms of the covenant, they would live in peace with the Muslims; but any violation of the covenant would lead to grave consequences.

An Assassination Attempt

The Naḍīr tribe was headed by Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, their chief rabbi. Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab reportedly recognized the Prophet when the latter arrived in Madinah, and confirmed that he was God's Messenger. Nevertheless, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab declared that he would remain an enemy to the Prophet to his last day.[5] He was certainly true to his word. Yet this enmity had no reason other than the fact that Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not belong to the Jews. It seems as if it reflected a quarrel with God Himself for having chosen a non-Jew to be His final Messenger, when "God knows best whom to entrust with His message." (6: 124)

After the defeat the Muslims suffered at the Battle of Uḥud in the third year of the Hijri calendar, and the two treacherous attacks on their people at al-Rajīʿ and Biʾr Maʿūnah, the internal enemy (represented by the hypocrites and the Jews) became confident and were more open in their hostility. Therefore, the Prophet wanted to test the degree of commitment the Jews felt toward the covenant they had with him. He went to al-Naḍīr's quarters with a few of his Companions, requesting help with raising the blood money required to be paid by the Muslims for two men who were accidentally killed. The chiefs of al-Naḍīr said to the Prophet that they would go about raising the money, but they plotted to assassinate him by dropping a rock from a rooftop over his head. The Prophet was informed by the angel of the plot and he left immediately.[6]

The Prophet sent them a message telling them that because of their treachery, they were required to leave Madinah within ten days. They would retain their

[4] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 2, pp. 427-428. See also, al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, vol. 1, p. 178.
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despaired that anyone would see the light of the truth of his message. This was his role as "mercy to all the worlds", and he fulfilled it to the best of his ability.

The Naḍīr left Madinah: most of them settled in Khaybar to the north, although some went further north, to Syria and beyond. The only major Jewish tribe left in Madinah was the Qurayẓah. Its chief rabbi, Ka'b ibn Asad, had so far remained faithful to the covenant signed with the Muslim community. However, this was not to continue for long. Because of the special situation of the Qurayẓah Jews, I discuss this in the next chapter.

A few small Jewish tribes remained in Madinah after its major tribes had been evacuated. There is little about them in the books of Muslim historians. This is due to the fact that there was little to report in this area, as major events were taking place on other fronts. The main concentration of Jews left in Arabia was at Khaybar, which was a city surrounded by fertile land. Khaybar was the host of a sizeable section of the Jewish tribes evacuated from Madinah in addition to its own Jewish population.

Khaybar, Fadak and Taymā'

On his return to Madinah after signing the peace agreement of al-Ḥudaybiyah (towards the end of year six), the Prophet learnt that the Jews of Khaybar were forging an alliance of forces who were hostile to the Muslim community. In Chapter 2, I included a brief account of the Battle of Khaybar and the victory achieved by the small Muslim army there. The Prophet wanted to evacuate the Jews from Khaybar, but after they agreed to leave, they had second thoughts. They were attached to their town and land, but realized that they could not defeat the Muslims. Therefore, they made an offer to the Prophet: he would allow them to stay and attend to the land in return for half its produce. The Prophet had agreed, but stipulated a condition that the Muslims would be free to abrogate this agreement at a future date.

There were other Jewish localities in northern Arabia, such as Fadak, Wādī al-Qurā and Taymā'. On learning of the Muslims' victory at Khaybar, the people of Fadak sent a delegation to the Prophet, requesting that he sign a peace agreement with them, with the same terms as the people of Khaybar. The Prophet agreed to this. However, according to the Islamic rules their payment to the Prophet (of half the produce of their land), belonged to him alone: as neither mobilization nor fighting were involved in obtaining it. The Prophet used that income to help the poor in the Muslim community. Wādī al-Qurā and Taymā' were different cases. The Prophet besieged them and some individual fights led to the killing of a few of their best fighters. They realized that continuing with

the fight would only lead to a greater number of casualties, and they submitted. The Prophet gave them the same terms as the Jews of Khaybar.

Arabs and Jews

It has been said by some people that there was a marked difference between the way the Prophet dealt with the defeated Arabs and the Jews who opposed him. In no case of the Arab tribes who fought him did he force them to leave their land: they remained in their cities, towns or encampments. By contrast, when the Prophet triumphed over the Jews, they were evacuated. Does the difference in treatment reflect an attitude of discrimination? Before we draw any conclusion we need to consider the following points:

1. The Arabs who opposed the Prophet (such as the Quraysh and the Ghaṭafān) were open in their hostility from the beginning. The Jews were in Madinah when the Prophet arrived and settled there. He made a covenant with them to live side by side, with the responsibilities of each group well defined. The covenant considered both Muslims and Jews of Madinah as one nation. It established a pluralist society in which all were free to make their choices and live as they wished. But the Jews violated the covenant time after time, taking an unjustifiably hostile attitude. How could coexistence be continued in this case?
2. The three Jewish tribes who were evacuated lived in Madinah, while none of the Arabs who fought the Muslims were living there. Thus, when those tribes chose to violate their covenant and go on the offensive, they became an internal enemy. That could not be tolerated.
3. The Prophet made it clear, from the first instance, that he would not stand for any nonsense: the covenant was binding to all and must be respected. When the first tribe was evacuated, this should have served as a clear warning to the others that they would face the same fate unless they abided by the terms of the covenant. Yet, the Naḍīr tribe wanted to kill the Prophet when he was in their quarters, and the Qurayẓah joined the forces determined to annihilate the Muslim community.
4. In violating their covenant, the Jews reflected an inward-looking attitude. They were fully aware of the impending appearance of God's final Messenger. Indeed, they chose to settle in Madinah because they were aware that he would immigrate there, as stated in the Torah and confirmed by some of their most learned rabbis. They hoped that this Messenger would be one of them. When they realized that God chose an Arab to be

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His final Messenger, they begrudged him this honour. He did not force them to abandon their religion; he only called on them to do what their holy book wanted them to do.

5. Although the Khaybar Jews also merited evacuation, because they tried to raise forces to fight the Muslims, the Prophet allowed them to stay and made a peace agreement with them. He made similar agreements with other Jewish concentrations in the Arabian Peninsula. He thus showed that he was not hostile to peaceful coexistence and cooperation with them: he simply wanted to prevent any danger to the Muslim community.
6. The terms of evacuation were by no means harsh. The evacuees were allowed to take a camel-load each of their belongings, except arms. That concession would have enabled them to settle where they chose. Moreover, there were no border restrictions to prevent them going wherever they wished. Indeed, their presence in Madinah was an act of choice. They came as immigrants and they could choose their place of settlement in the same way.

Careful consideration of the Prophet's treatment of the Jews who chose to be hostile to him, shows that he was most lenient with them. No other victor in history has dealt with their enemies with the same spirit of respect and leniency as Muhammad (peace be upon him).

CHAPTER 18

THE FATE OF THE QURAYẒAH JEWS

A NUMBER OF the leaders of the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍīr settled in Khaybar (in northern Arabia) after the tribe had been evacuated from Madinah. These harboured a strong grudge against Islam and its Prophet. Several of them went to Makkah and spoke to the chiefs of the Quraysh, and then to Ghaṭafān, to enlist their support. The plan, as agreed to by the three groups, was to gather the largest force possible and to march to Madinah in order to put an end to Islam and the Muslims. However, as I noted in Chapter 2, the Prophet received intelligence of the large army heading towards Madinah. He and his Companions fortified the city by digging a dry moat across its entrance. The unbelievers' army had to encamp on the other side of the moat, as they were unable to cross it.

The only major Jewish tribe left in Madinah was the Qurayẓah, who had, until then, honoured its covenant with the Muslims and lived in peace with them. However, Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, the Jewish rabbi who was the architect of the alliance, felt that a long siege would bring no results, since the Muslims in Madinah had their supplies within it (in fact, the siege was harder on the attackers). Realizing this, Ḥuyayy went to the Qurayẓah and persuaded Kaʿb ibn Asad, their chief rabbi, to agree to break the covenant with the Prophet and join the enemy alliance. The idea was to launch a pincer attack from the north and south of Madinah to crush its Muslim population. Preparations for this attack were well underway when God intervened, sending a powerful storm that caused the Quraysh and the Ghaṭafān to withdraw. The Muslims then set siege to the Qurayẓah. After twenty-five days of siege, the Qurayẓah Jews agreed to submit to the ruling of the Prophet. He allowed them to choose their judge from among his Companions. They chose Saʿd ibn Muʿādh, as he was their ally in pre-Islamic days.

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What happened then is subject to controversy. Most Muslim historians uphold the version given by Muhammad ibn Isḥāq (died 151 AH / 768 CE) who reports that Saʿd ibn Muʿādh's verdict was to kill all men and enslave all women and children.[1] This story, however, is far from accurate: in fact, it is fundamentally flawed and it is contradicted by other events.[2]

Ibn Isḥāq, whose biography of the Prophet is retained by Ibn Hishām, mentions that when the siege began to bite, the Qurayẓah requested the Prophet to send them one of his Companions, Abū Lubābah ibn ʿAbd al-Mundhir, as they wanted to consult him on their situation. When Abū Lubābah entered their fort, their men rose to greet him and the women and children met him weeping. He felt very sympathetic. They asked him whether they should submit to Muhammad's ruling. "He said, 'yes', and signalled with his hand across his neck implying that it would be their execution." Ibn Isḥāq quotes him: "I hardly took a step before realizing that I betrayed God and His Messenger." He left the Qurayẓah quarters not knowing where to go, but did not return to the Prophet. He ultimately tied himself to a pillar in the mosque declaring that he would not leave until he was assured of God accepting his repentance.[3] Ibn Isḥāq further mentions that Abū Lubābah remained tied to the pillar for six nights, until a Qur'ānic verse was revealed indicating that God has accepted his repentance. The verse states: "There are others who have acknowledged their sins, after having mixed righteous deeds with evil ones. It may well be that God will accept their repentance. God is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."[4] (9: 102)

This part of the story is flawed on three counts, which I will outline here:

Firstly, the Qurayẓah asked for Abū Lubābah in particular because they knew that he wished them well. This is clear from what is said about the way they showed him how distressed they were: he was almost in tears because of their distress. Then, we are told that he advised them to submit to the Prophet's ruling and at the same time pointed out to them that the ruling would be their execution. This infers that when the Prophet let them choose their judge, the verdict given by the judge had already been discussed and settled on in the Muslim camp. The Saʿd's court would therefore merely have officiated a

1 Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, pp. 257-259.

2 In the early editions of my book, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, I followed the same line, arguing the case for such a judgement. However, I admit that I felt uneasy about the case and hoped that further research would bring things in better light. I subsequently realized that the story could not stand up to close examination. I rewrote the relevant sections and included them in later editions starting in 2008.

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Secondly, is it possible, or logical, that Abū Lubābah would advise the Qurayẓah to submit to the Prophet's verdict and at the same time signal them that the verdict would be their death? Since he was their friend and had many relations with them, would he not advise them to seek a different way: rather than convincing them to accept a pre-determined death sentence? Besides, they eventually took his advice and submitted to the Prophet's verdict, whatever it might be. Had they known that the verdict had already been decided as execution, it seems unlikely that they would have deliberately chosen that course of action.

Finally, a more authentic report concerning Abū Lubābah tying himself to a pillar in the mosque mentions that this took place four years later: that is, after the expedition to Tabūk. In this account, the Prophet had ordered all Muslims to join the expedition; however, a number of people stayed behind. Most of these were hypocrites (they were pretending to be Muslims but were not), although a few, less than ten, were genuine believers who had failed to do as they were bid. Three of these went to the Prophet and admitted their guilt. They were treated in a special way.[5] The others tied themselves to pillars in the mosque as a gesture of admission of guilt and apology to the Prophet. They hoped that the Prophet would pardon them and order their release. The Prophet left the matter for God to decide. A few days later, their pardon was revealed in the above-quoted Qur'ānic verse (9: 102).[6] This whole *sūrah* comments on the attitude of the hypocrites as was manifested during the preparations for the Expedition of Tabūk and on subsequent events. Ibn

5 For the full details of the story of "the three left behind", see Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2008, pp. 710-717.

6 Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 5, Beirut, 1988, p. 272.

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Secondly, is it possible, or logical, that Abū Lubābah would advise the Qurayẓah to submit to the Prophet's verdict and at the same time signal them that the verdict would be their death? Since he was their friend and had many relations with them, would he not advise them to seek a different way: rather than convincing them to accept a pre-determined death sentence? Besides, they eventually took his advice and submitted to the Prophet's verdict, whatever it might be. Had they known that the verdict had already been decided as execution, it seems unlikely that they would have deliberately chosen that course of action.

Finally, a more authentic report concerning Abū Lubābah tying himself to a pillar in the mosque mentions that this took place four years later: that is, after the expedition to Tabūk. In this account, the Prophet had ordered all Muslims to join the expedition; however, a number of people stayed behind. Most of these were hypocrites (they were pretending to be Muslims but were not), although a few, less than ten, were genuine believers who had failed to do as they were bid. Three of these went to the Prophet and admitted their guilt. They were treated in a special way.[5] The others tied themselves to pillars in the mosque as a gesture of admission of guilt and apology to the Prophet. They hoped that the Prophet would pardon them and order their release. The Prophet left the matter for God to decide. A few days later, their pardon was revealed in the above-quoted Qur'ānic verse (9: 102).[6] This whole *sūrah* comments on the attitude of the hypocrites as was manifested during the preparations for the Expedition of Tabūk and on subsequent events. Ibn

[5] For the full details of the story of "the three left behind", see Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2008, pp. 710-717.

[6] Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah*, vol. 5, Beirut, 1988, p. 272.

Many report this same tale, with a few variations. The Qurayẓah episode took place in 627 CE, four years before the conquest of Makkah. It is unlikely that this Lutharī had himself to a pillar in the mosque on two occasions, four years apart, and received his pardon by the same Jewish on the second occasion.

When the siege started to take hard at them, the Qurayẓah sent a message to the Prophet, which stated that they were willing to surrender and accept whatever ruling he made against them. The Muslims of the Aws spoke to the Prophet, pleading for the Qurayẓah because they were their allies. The Prophet said to them: "Will you be happy if a man from among you gives the judgement?" They said: "Yes, we will." The Prophet then assigned this task to Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh. A different report mentions that the Prophet told the Qurayẓah to choose their judge from among his Companions, and they chose Sa'd, because he was their ally and they hoped that he would be lenient.

Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh had been wounded by a stray arrow, and was being nursed during the siege of the Qurayẓah. He was brought to the Prophet's tent to give his ruling. He started by making sure that his verdict would be binding on both the Jews and the Muslims. Both confirmed that it would. He then said: "I hereby rule that the fighters from the Qurayẓah are to be killed, their properties to be divided, their women and children taken prisoner, and their property distributed." (Related by al-Bukhārī.) The Prophet endorsed the ruling and said it was God's.

The judgement was then implemented. At the Prophet's orders, the condemned people of the Qurayẓah were taken to Madinah: here the men were detained in the house of Usāmah ibn Zayd; while the women and children were detained in the house of a woman called Kayyisah bint al-Ḥārith.[7] Their armaments and movable properties were also taken to Madinah and their cattle were left in their fields. They were given dates to eat. According to Ibn Isḥāq, however, Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh's ruling applied to everyone in the Qurayẓah, which meant that all their men were killed and all their women and children were enslaved. Most Muslim historians quote him and accept his report as accurate; nevertheless, I find it seriously flawed.

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Muslim historians, he concentrates on the battles that took place during the Prophet's lifetime. Scholars of the ḥadīth criticize Ibn Ishāq's method, as he combines reports that he learnt from various people in order to give a complete and coherent narrative of each event. Thus, he does not mention each time the name of the scholar from whom he learnt it. In defence of Ibn Ishāq, I argue that as a historian his was an appropriate method; despite the fact that it does not allow a proper examination of his sources. To a reader of history, an account of many events could become too cumbersome if every small detail is attributed to its source when there are several sources. On the other hand, were Ibn Ishāq to recount the reports of everyone of his sources separately, there would be much repetition in his narrative and readers would find it difficult to identify the more reliable versions. Nevertheless, Ibn Ishāq's method leaves him vulnerable to the charge of transmitting false or inaccurate reports.

In order to obtain a more accurate report of the event, we have to consider what is available from more reliable sources. The Qur'ān provides a brief comment on the fate of the Qurayẓah tribe. It says that God "brought down from their strongholds those of the people of earlier revelations who aided them [i.e. the idolaters], casting terror in their hearts: some you slew, and some you took captive. And He passed on to you their land, their houses and their goods, as well as a land on which you had never yet set foot. God has power over all things." (33: 26-27)

The Qur'ān commented on the fact that the Muslims cut a number of date trees during the siege of al-Naḍīr Jewish tribe, and gave justification for this. Likewise, had all the Qurayẓah people been killed or taken captive, the Qur'ān would have explained the need for such treatment. The other reliable source is al-Bukhārī's anthology of authentic traditions of the Prophet. There are two statements that speak of Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh's judgment in this, and both state that he ruled that "their fighters were to be killed and their offspring to be taken captive."[8]

The basic flaw in Ibn Isḥāq's story is that it makes the judgement applicable to every single person of the Qurayẓah Jews: thus returning a death sentence against all adult males and captivity against all women and children. There is nothing in either the Qur'ānic or the ḥadīth texts to confirm this. The Qur'ān speaks of some people being killed and some taken prisoner, and the two ḥadīth traditions speak of executing the fighters and imprisoning their offspring.

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Furthermore, it is suggested that moats were dug in the market place to kill these people. Places in Madinah where important events took place during the early period of Islam are well known and have been marked out. The mosques that were built during the Prophet's lifetime, such as the Qubā' and the Qiblatayn mosques, remain standing. Yet, there are no markings for the moats that were assumed to have been dug for this mass execution.

Also, It is customary for Ibn Isḥāq to mention the names of the people involved in every important event he documents. He mentions, for example, the names of every one of the Prophet's Companions who immigrated to Abyssinia (101 in total) and every one who took part in the Battle of Badr as well as their ancestors and clans (313 people). On this occasion, he mentions only two people: Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab and al-Zubayr ibn Bāṭā, and he reports conversations that took place before they were put to death. He mentions that the Prophet pardoned the latter, and returned his property to him. Yet al-Zubayr ibn Bāṭā preferred to die, because the perpetrators of the Qurayẓah treachery had received their just punishment. Ibn Isḥāq reports the cases of those who were granted a special pardon, giving their names and identifying those who interceded for them; he does not give us many details about those who were presumed to have been executed. He would have been unlikely to have given the names of all the Qurayẓah people, as these ran into several hundreds; he could, however, have at least given us the names of the more distinguished figures among them.

Finally, Muhammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī (130-207 AH / 748-822 CE) provides more details. Al-Wāqidī was a prominent historian who wrote extensively about the history of Islam, often relying on primary sources and visiting all the places where major events in the Prophet's lifetime took place. Al-Wāqidī gives the names of nine people who were executed as a result of Saʿd ibn Muʿādh's ruling: Kaʿb ibn Asad, the Qurayẓah chief who agreed to the treachery; Ḥuyayy ibn Akhṭab, the one who worked hard to raise the attacking forces that sought

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Ibn Isḥāq's account of the life of the Prophet was the main source on which later historians relied as they analysed events that took place during the Prophet's lifetime. Yet in this case, I feel that this discussion is on solid ground when rejecting his report on the fate of the Jewish tribe of Qurayẓah.

The first reason for rejecting this report is that meting out such a collective punishment is contrary to Islamic teachings and to the Prophet's own practice. Islam does not condone punishing a group of people for the crime of one, or punishing many for the crime of a few. Rather, it punishes all those who actually take part in a crime. Thus, if ten people collaborate in murdering one person, all are equally punished. In a case such as that of the Qurayẓah, the leaders of the tribe and some of those close to them ultimately take a decision and ensure that it is acted upon. The majority of the tribesmen merely go along with whatever decision is made and have little say in what is decided. To mete out the same punishment to all would therefore not fit with the Islamic standards of justice.

The Prophet understood the nature of his mission right from the outset. In the early days of his prophethood, the essence of his mission was defined for him by God: "We have sent you as a [manifestation of Our] grace towards all the worlds." (21: 107) Throughout the twenty-three years of his mission, the Prophet manifested this aspect of grace in everything he did. Several people attempted to kill him on different occasions, but he pardoned them all. At the height of his triumph, he pardoned the people of the Quraysh, who had been very hostile to him, including most of the nineteen people he had already sentenced to death for their persistent hostility to Islam. He adopted the same attitude with the Jews, even with those who tried to assassinate him. The Prophet might have sanctioned the killing of Sallām ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq; but this was only because the latter was party to forging the alliance that tried to attack Madinah and eradicate Islam and the Muslims. Conversely, when the Prophet defeated the Jews of Khaybar, he told members of the Abī al-Ḥuqayq family, many of whom were actively hostile to Islam, that he would not punish them for their past

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attitude. When we consider all this evidence of mercy given to past enemies, Ibn Isḥāq's account seems very odd.

View on Collective Punishment

A very important fact, and one that also supports the rejection of Ibn Isḥāq's report, is that none of the leading jurists in Islamic history appear to have considered its import. The Prophet's statements and actions are well known to have served as basis for rulings in similar cases. If such a collective punishment was meted out to the Qurayẓah people, such jurists would have considered the conditions that permit the infliction of such collective punishment. The fact that not a single jurist allows collective punishment (wherein many are punished for a crime committed by a few) indicates that the report is unacceptable to them.

In one example, we find Imām al-Awzāʿī (d. 157 AH / 774 CE) objecting very strongly to collective punishment. Trouble broke out among a community of non-Muslims in Lebanon. When the governor, Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAlī, put down the sedition, he wanted that community to move out of their land and settle elsewhere. Imam al-Awzāʿī objected strongly, saying to the governor: "As far as I know, it is not a rule of God that God should punish the many for the fault of the few but punish the few for the fault of the many."[10] Quoting this, Imām al-Qāsim ibn Sallām shows, with absolute clarity, that collective punishment is alien to Islamic values, principles and legislation. Ibn Sallām was a scholar of the same calibre as the founders of the four schools of thought. He is considered to have had his own school of thought, although this did not survive long enough to be followed in later generations.

Professor Walid Arafat's scholarly paper in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1976) discusses Ibn Isḥāq's report and the treatment of the Jews in Madinah. Arafat discusses Ibn Isḥāq's sources and suggests the story was probably told to Ibn Isḥāq by the descendants of some of the Qurayẓah Jews, whose ancestors were punished by the Prophet. Ibn Isḥāq was known to seek descendants and families of the Prophet's contemporaries and to ask them for details, reported by their families, about events that took place during the Prophet's lifetime. This attitude by Ibn Isḥāq is commendable, because it sought primary sources. However, he should have been more careful, and checked his information thoroughly, before recording it in his book. Arafat compares this report to the Masada case when 960 Jews are thought to have committed suicide in 73 CE rather than being taken captive by the Byzantine forces. Strong

[10] Al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, Beirut, 1981, p. 79.

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In one example, we find Imām al-Awzā'ī (d. 157 AH / 774 CE) objecting very strongly to collective punishment. Trouble broke out among a community of non-Muslims in Lebanon. When the governor, Ṣāliḥ ibn 'Alī, put down the sedition, he wanted that community to move out of their land and settle elsewhere. Imam al-Awzā'ī objected strongly, saying to the governor: "As far as I know, it is not a rule of God that God should punish the many for the fault of the few but punish the few for the fault of the many."[10] Quoting this, Imām al-Qāsim ibn Sallām shows, with absolute clarity, that collective punishment is alien to Islamic values, principles and legislation. Ibn Sallām was a scholar of the same calibre as the founders of the four schools of thought. He is considered to have had his own school of thought, although this did not survive long enough to be followed in later generations.

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CHAPTER 19

MUHAMMAD: THE STATESMAN

Perhaps no one in Arabia hated God's Messenger as I did. I was a man of noble birth, Christian by religion, and I enforced the rule which gave me one quarter of all spoils of war gained by my tribe.[1] This meant that I had my religion for myself and I was truly a king of my people. When I heard about the Prophet, I hated him.[2]

THESE WERE THE WORDS of ʿAdiyy ibn Ḥātim, the chief of the Ṭayy' tribe who lived in northern Arabia. By the time Makkah fell to Islam, close to the end of year eight (that is, twenty-one years after the start of the Prophet's mission), ʿAdiyy realized that Islam would sweep through the rest of Arabia, and he made his preparations for this eventuality. When he heard that a Muslim expedition was drawing close to his area, he fled. The expedition, led by the Prophet's cousin, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, destroyed al-Fuls, one of the main idols worshipped by the people of northern Arabia, and took a few prisoners from the Ṭayy' tribe, including ʿAdiyy's own sister, Sufānah. She was very upset with her brother, because he had left her behind but had taken his immediate family with him.

Thus Sufānah, whose father is even today held by all Arabs as a model of integrity and generosity, found herself captive in Madinah. She soon realized the nature of the Prophet's position among the Muslims, and she appealed to him, explaining her distress: "Messenger of God, my parents are dead and my guardian has disappeared. Be generous to me, may God be generous to you."[3] After she had repeated her appeal on three consecutive days, the Prophet

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CHAPTER 19

MUHAMMAD: THE STATESMAN

Perhaps no one in Arabia hated God's Messenger as I did. I was a man of noble birth, Christian by religion, and I enforced the rule which gave me one quarter of all spoils of war gained by my tribe.[1] This meant that I had my religion for myself and I was truly a king of my people. When I heard about the Prophet, I hated him.[2]

THESE WERE THE WORDS of ʿAdiyy ibn Ḥātim, the chief of the Ṭayy' tribe who lived in northern Arabia. By the time Makkah fell to Islam, close to the end of year eight (that is, twenty-one years after the start of the Prophet's mission), ʿAdiyy realized that Islam would sweep through the rest of Arabia, and he made his preparations for this eventuality. When he heard that a Muslim expedition was drawing close to his area, he fled. The expedition, led by the Prophet's cousin, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, destroyed al-Fuls, one of the main idols worshipped by the people of northern Arabia, and took a few prisoners from the Ṭayy' tribe, including ʿAdiyy's own sister, Sufānah. She was very upset with her brother, because he had left her behind but had taken his immediate family with him.

Thus Sufānah, whose father is even today held by all Arabs as a model of integrity and generosity, found herself captive in Madinah. She soon realized the nature of the Prophet's position among the Muslims, and she appealed to him, explaining her distress: "Messenger of God, my parents are dead and my guardian has disappeared. Be generous to me, may God be generous to you."[3] After she had repeated her appeal on three consecutive days, the Prophet

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[1] This was done by tribal chiefs who enjoyed undisputed authority among their people.
[2] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 246.
[3] Ibid, p. 247.

granted her freedom, but told her to stay in Madinah until she found some trustworthy people who could escort her to her place. He told her to inform him before she travelled. When she was about to leave Madinah, the Prophet gave her a camel to ride, some clothes and some money. She travelled further than her own place: she went instead to Syria to meet her brother. After severely remonstrating with him for abandoning her, she advised him to go to Madinah and meet the Prophet. She explained to him that whether Muhammad was a Prophet or a king, it was not in ʿAdiyy's interest to oppose him. She withheld from him the fact that she had accepted Islam.

ʿAdiyy ibn Ḥātim took her advice and travelled to Madinah. He gives a long report about his visit, but we are concerned here with his first impressions:

> I went to see the Prophet in his mosque. When I greeted him, he asked me my name, and I said: "ʿAdiyy ibn Ḥātim." He then stood up and took me to his home. As we walked to his place, an elderly, weak woman stopped him. He stood with her for a long while as she explained what she wanted. I thought to myself: "He is certainly not a king." He then took me into his rooms, gave me a cushion and said: "Sit on this." I said: "No, you sit on it." He said: "It is yours." I sat down on the cushion and he sat on the floor. Again I thought to myself: "He is certainly not a king."[4]

Such was the first impression of a man who, by his own admission, was behaving like a king among his people. He had come to assess whether Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a king or a Prophet, at a time when Muhammad was at the height of his power. A few months earlier the Prophet had returned to Madinah after having marched into Makkah and achieved his victory at Ḥunayn, securing great military and material gains for his people. Although at that time the Prophet was the undisputed leader of Arabia, nevertheless, he behaved selflessly. For example, he would stop in the street for long discussions with an elderly, weak woman, attending to her request and ensuring that she had what she needed. Likewise, he would sit on the floor in his own home, giving his cushion to his guest to sit upon.

It is rightly said that power corrupts, and there are countless examples of leaders forsaking or forgetting their ideals once they are in power. The Prophet never sought power for himself. When he established a large state whose people pledged full and undoubting allegiance to him, he never for a moment thought

[4] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 246. For the full details of ʿAdiyy ibn Ḥātim's story, see Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, The Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, 2008, pp. 674-677.

of himself as a king or head of state. He continued to behave in the same way always.

However, he never forgot the duty God had assigned to him: to deliver His message and call on people to accept it. When the Quraysh opposed him, and publicly confined his message within the boundaries of Makkah, he sought to advance his message elsewhere. He sent a group of his followers to Abyssinia to establish a second base for his message. At the same time, he addressed other tribes when they gathered in Makkah for the pilgrimage season. He realised that he needed a safe base from which he could address people. When he spoke to different tribes, he enquired about their ability and willingness to defend him while he addressed his message to others. He also realised back in the early years of his message that he needed the power of a state to provide a safe haven for the advocates of Islam.

When he had finally established his solid base in Madinah, he sought first of all to ensure full security for his followers and for the other citizens in Madinah. As noted in previous chapters, he made a covenant, to which all sections of the population committed themselves. This document defined responsibilities and commitments, and made all groups – Muslims, Jews and idolaters – one nation together, with equal rights in Madinah; although when disagreement between them arose, the Prophet was the final arbiter. Thus, these communities lived side by side in peace. Each community looked after its own people and shared in the responsibility for their behaviour; but they were united in the face of any aggression by any outside power or group. That was a model of a pluralist society where no group sought to establish authority over other groups. Although this went sour afterwards with some groups, this was due to no fault of Islam or the Muslims; other groups were always the aggressors.

The Prophet's first responsibility was to his own people, the Muslims. He forged a community in which tribal affiliation was a very secondary issue, as the bond of faith replaced all other bonds. He cared for them in a way that won their wholehearted love. Asmāʾ bint ʿUmays, who was among the immigrants to Abyssinia and the last to return, compared the immigrants' fortunes to those of the Muslims in Madinah:

> You were with God's Messenger (peace be upon him) who fed those of you who were hungry and admonished the ignorant, while we were in the land of hostile strangers, staying there only for the sake of God and His Messenger... We were abused and we often experienced fear. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

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There is no doubt that the Prophet looked after his community. For example, the people known as Ahl al-Ṣuffah, who joined the Muslims in Madinah came from different tribes and areas, but were all poor and homeless. The Prophet put them in a shelter near the mosque and ensured that they had food. Circumstances were sometimes very difficult, but the Prophet always managed to give them something. The Prophet lived a life of poverty, but he never forgot those who were in need. Often God blessed a small meal so that it was sufficient for a large number of people. This was all in answer to the Prophet's prayers, which he made because he cared for his people and wanted to alleviate their troubles.

At the same time, the Prophet always had an eye for justice. He never took away anything from anyone unfairly, even when no one could question his decisions. Institutions of honour were given very high importance in Arabia. They were traditionally vested in certain clans, and the clan would exert every effort to prove that it was worthy of the honour. One of these was carrying the banner in the battlefield. Since the banner is the rallying point during a battle, keeping it hoisted high was of great importance. In the Battle of Badr, the Quraysh banner was soon dropped as its bearer was killed. The clan of 'Abd al-Dār traditionally held the Quraysh banner, and just before the Battle of Uḥud started, the Quraysh leader tried to motivate the 'Abd al-Dār by asking them whether they might lose the banner. They assured him that they would defend it with their souls. Although the Prophet was under no obligation to appoint any specific clan to hold his banner, he enquired before the battle who was carrying the Quraysh banner. When he was told that it was the 'Abd al-Dār clan, he said, "It more behoves us to keep honour where it belonged." He called Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr, who belonged to the 'Abd al-Dār clan, and gave him the banner of the Muslim army.

Other institutions of honour that the people of the Quraysh were proud to hold included *siqāyah* (the provision of drinking water for the pilgrims while they were in Makkah and the pilgrimage area), *rifādah* (the provision of food for pilgrims), and *sidānah* (the custody of the Ka'bah). The last of these also belonged to the 'Abd al-Dār clan, while the provision of food and water belonged to the Prophet's own clan, the Hāshimites.

When Makkah fell to Islam, the Prophet requested the key to the door of the Ka'bah and he was given it. A few days later, people from his clan requested him to give them the honour of being custodians of the Ka'bah, in addition to the other two institutions. No one could have faulted the Prophet if he had granted this request, because the Quraysh had been hostile toward him for twenty-one years. Now that he was the master of Makkah, he could do what he liked, yet

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his response was: "This is a day of honesty, when promises are honoured."[5] He called in ʿUthmān ibn Ṭalḥah and gave the keys back to him.

Such care and honesty were marks of the Prophet's leadership throughout his career. These endeared him to everyone in his community, because everyone realized that they would be given their rights and they would receive more of his care and love. This is the mark of great leadership, and it is part of his constant aim of the pursuit of right.

When the Prophet established the Muslim state in Madinah, it was a city-state in the midst of a desert area that was inhabited by tribes who lived wherever they could find water and fertile land. The Quraysh was the strongest and most highly respected of all the Arab tribes. They were very hostile to Islam, and this hostility increased after the Prophet and his Companions found support in Madinah, with its two tribes (the Aws and the Khazraj) joining Islam in large numbers. All other tribes took an attitude to Islam ranging from hostility to wait-and-see. Only the Khuzāʿah, who lived close to the sea (in the area close to Jeddah), were friendly to the Muslim state. There were some Muslims among the people of Khuzāʿah, but the majority still worshipped idols. Surrounded by hostility, the Prophet needed to consolidate his state and to ensure its immunity to attack by any hostile force.

As noted in previous chapters, the expeditions the Prophet sent out in different directions aimed to give Arabs in the area around Madinah a feeling that the Muslim state was strong and ready to meet any situation. The Prophet did not go with the first few expeditions. However, he went at the head of an expedition for the first time after one year of his settlement in Madinah. He wanted to intercept a trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh but this eluded him. He signed a treaty with the Ḍamrah tribe. The treaty stipulated that the two sides would not launch an attack on each other:

> The Ḍamrah must not help or join an enemy of the Prophet. They and their property are safe from attack. They are entitled to be helped against any aggression by anyone. Likewise, they are committed to help the Prophet at any time, unless they are attacked. If the Prophet would call on them for help, they would certainly answer his call.[6]

This type of treaty is known today as a *joint-defence treaty*. The Prophet concluded several such treaties with different tribes, particularly those in the

[5] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 4, p. 32.
[6] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suhaylī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Unuf*, vol. 3, p. 28.

There is no doubt that the Prophet looked after his community. For example, the people known as Ahl al-Ṣuffah, who joined the Muslims in Madinah, came from different tribes and areas, but were all poor and homeless. The Prophet put them in a shelter near the mosque and ensured that they had food. Circumstances were sometimes very difficult, but the Prophet always managed to give them something. The Prophet lived a life of poverty, but he never forgot those who were in need. Often God blessed a small meal so that it was sufficient for a large number of people. This was all in answer to the Prophet's prayers, which he made because he cared for his people and wanted to alleviate their troubles.

At the same time, the Prophet always had an eye for justice. He never took away anything from anyone unfairly, even when no one could question his decisions. Institutions of honour were given very high importance in Arabia. They were traditionally vested in certain clans, and the clan would exert every effort to prove that it was worthy of the honour. One of these was carrying the banner in the battlefield. Since the banner is the rallying point during a battle, keeping it hoisted high was of great importance. In the Battle of Badr, the Quraysh banner was soon dropped as its bearer was killed. The clan of ʿAbd al-Dār traditionally held the Quraysh banner, and just before the Battle of Uḥud started, the Quraysh leader tried to motivate the ʿAbd al-Dār by asking them whether they might lose the banner. They assured him that they would defend it with their souls. Although the Prophet was under no obligation to appoint any specific clan to hold his banner, he enquired before the battle who was carrying the Quraysh banner. When he was told that it was the ʿAbd al-Dār clan, he said: "It more behoves us to keep honour where it belonged." He called Muṣʿab ibn ʿUmayr, who belonged to the ʿAbd al-Dār clan, and gave him the banner of the Muslim army.

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When Makkah fell to Islam, the Prophet requested the key to the door of the Kaʿbah and he was given it. A few days later, people from his clan requested him to give them the honour of being custodians of the Kaʿbah, in addition to the other two institutions. No one could have faulted the Prophet if he had granted this request, because the Quraysh had been hostile toward him for twenty-one years. Now that he was the master of Makkah, he could do what he liked, yet

his response was: "This is a day of honesty, when promises are honoured."[5] He called in ʿUthmān ibn Ṭalḥah and gave the keys back to him.

Such care and honesty were marks of the Prophet's leadership throughout his career. These endeared him to everyone in his community, because everyone realized that they would be given their rights and they would receive more of his care and love. This is the mark of great leadership, and it is part of his constant aim of the pursuit of right.

When the Prophet established the Muslim state in Madinah, it was a city-state in the midst of a desert area that was inhabited by tribes who lived wherever they could find water and fertile land. The Quraysh was the strongest and most highly respected of all the Arab tribes. They were very hostile to Islam, and this hostility increased after the Prophet and his Companions found support in Madinah, with its two tribes (the Aws and the Khazraj) joining Islam in large numbers. All other tribes took an attitude to Islam ranging from hostility to wait-and-see. Only the Khuzāʿah, who lived close to the sea (in the area close to Jeddah), were friendly to the Muslim state. There were some Muslims among the people of Khuzāʿah, but the majority still worshipped idols. Surrounded by hostility, the Prophet needed to consolidate his state and to ensure its immunity to attack by any hostile force.

As noted in previous chapters, the expeditions the Prophet sent out in different directions aimed to give Arabs in the area around Madinah a feeling that the Muslim state was strong and ready to meet any situation. The Prophet did not go with the first few expeditions. However, he went at the head of an expedition for the first time after one year of his settlement in Madinah. He wanted to intercept a trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh but this eluded him. He signed a treaty with the Ḍamrah tribe. The treaty stipulated that the two sides would not launch an attack on each other:

> The Ḍamrah must not help or join an enemy of the Prophet. They and their property are safe from attack. They are entitled to be helped against any aggression by anyone. Likewise, they are committed to help the Prophet at any time, unless they are attacked. If the Prophet would call on them for help, they would certainly answer his call.[6]

This type of treaty is known today as a *joint-defence treaty*. The Prophet concluded several such treaties with different tribes, particularly those in the

[5] Ibn Hishām, ibid., vol. 4, p. 32.
[6] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suhaylī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Unuf*, vol. 3, p. 28.

area between Makkah and Madinah, and in this way he denied the Quraysh a chance to make an alliance with them. This was very important during the early years, when the Quraysh raised one army after another to attack the Muslims in a series of attempts to crush the Muslim state.

A few years later, when the Prophet had concluded the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement with the Quraysh, he also concluded some treaties with tribes in the northern areas of Arabia. The terms of these agreements were different. The Muslim state in Madinah feared nothing from these tribes. In fact, the tribes were in need of help from the Muslims. This is reflected in the terms and conditions in these agreements.

When the Prophet was in Tabūk in year nine, Yuḥannā ibn Ru'bah, a Christian priest who ruled a place called Aylah, came over to meet the Prophet. He was wearing a gold crucifix. His appearance was contrary to Islamic values as Islam forbids gold for men and denies the crucifixion. Nevertheless, the Prophet welcomed him, gave him a gift of Yemeni clothes and made a written agreement with him, which stated:

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent. This is a pledge of security given by God and Muhammad the Prophet, God's Messenger, to Yuḥannā ibn Ru'bah and the people of Aylah, their boats and caravans travelling in land and on sea. They are given this covenant with God and with Muhammad the Prophet which includes all those who are with them, be they of the people of Syria or the people of Yemen or sailors. If any of them commits an offence, his money does not prevent his punishment in person. It is good for whoever takes it. They are not allowed to prevent people from making use of any spring of water which they have in land or sea.[7]

The Prophet also concluded agreements with the people of Adhruḥ in southern Palestine and the people of Maqna, both of whom were Jews. The agreements stipulated that they were given pledges of security and safety from the Muslims. In return, they had to pay a certain yearly amount to the Muslim state, which was set at one quarter of their produce in the case of the people of Maqna and 100 gold dinars in the case of the people of Adhruḥ.

In these treaties, the case is clear: these people needed to be at peace with the Muslim state. They realized that the Muslims were gathering strength and becoming the dominant state in Arabia. Therefore, they needed to ensure their

[7] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 4, p. 180.

security from attack and that they would be helped by the Muslim state in case they were attacked by others. The treaties with these people allowed them to run their own affairs as they wished. They were of benefit to the Muslim state as they made its northern borders peaceful. Moreover, they ensured that the Muslims would receive early warnings in case the Byzantine Empire had any designs on its southern neighbour.

The Prophet viewed all treaties very seriously. He never broke a promise he gave to anyone, nor would he violate a treaty that had been concluded and witnessed by both parties. For example, a few moments after concluding the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement with the Quraysh, a Muslim who was imprisoned and tortured in Makkah arrived and sought refuge with the Muslims. His father was the Quraysh negotiator of the agreement. He demanded that the Muslim, Abū Jandal, should be handed over to him. The Prophet requested him to allow his son to stay with the Muslims. In his appeal to the father, the Prophet said: "The ink has not dried yet on the agreement document." The father adamantly refused. The Prophet consoled Abū Jandal and handed him over to his father, telling him: "It is not right for us in our faith to go back on our pledges."[8]

The Prophet's strict observance of commitments that he had made under treaties was mirrored by a serious view of any violation of treaties by the other side. Each one of the three Jewish tribes that were party to the Madinah convention was expelled from Madinah when they violated its terms and adopted a hostile attitude. The Qur'ān instructs the Prophet that should he fear treachery from any party to a treaty, he should announce to them the abrogation of the treaty, stipulating that a treaty cannot be abrogated without such notice: "And if you fear treachery from any folk, cast [your treaty with them] back to them in a fair manner. God does not love the treacherous." (8: 58)

Later, when the overwhelming majority of the population of Arabia had adopted Islam, it was God's decision to claim the entire Arabian Peninsula as a land of Islam. Therefore, all treaties that did not specify an expiry date were declared abrogated, with a notice of four months to provide the people concerned with some time to determine what they wished to do. The treaties that specified a date of expiry were to run to the end of their terms. This is clearly stated in the opening four verses of *Sūrah* 9. The Prophet made the required announcement on the grand day of pilgrimage, so that it would be known to all tribes at the same time. Thus, everyone was clear about their prospects and the options available to them, and they could make their decision with full recognition of the consequences.

[8] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 3, p. 367.

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International Address

When the Prophet concluded the Ḥudaybiyah peace agreement with the Quraysh and then achieved victory over the Jews of Khaybar, he realized that all threats from areas within Arabia had been neutralized. He then took a decisive step in his mission, addressing the message of Islam to the rulers of the countries neighbouring Arabia. He told them about his message and called on them to accept Islam. He stipulated that otherwise, they would bear responsibility for having denied their people the chance to accept the final form of the Divine message. His letters to these rulers reflect his full awareness of the situation in each of these states.

We may look at this correspondence by dividing it into several categories.

The first was his letter to Negus. Since "Negus" is the title of the ruler of Abyssinia, scholars differ as to whether this Negus to whom the Prophet wrote calling on him to accept Islam was the same one that had received the Muslim immigrants from Makkah fourteen years earlier, or if this was his successor. Although it is difficult to answer this question with certainty, it is likely that the Negus who allowed the immigrants to stay and advocate Islam, refusing to extradite them to the Quraysh, was a predecessor of the recipient of the Prophet's letter, as he welcomed the immigrants and realized the truth of Islam right at the beginning. Since the Prophet remained in contact with the immigrants, it is probable that Negus accepted Islam. Moreover, at one point the Prophet offered the *ghā'ib* prayer (the prayer for a deceased person in a remote area) for Negus. When the Prophet wrote to Negus, alongside his writing to other rulers, he was writing to a non-Muslim. Negus answered positively and declared himself a Muslim. He wrote a very kind letter to the Prophet assuring him of his allegiance and sent him gifts.

In the second category we may put together his letters to Heraculas, the Byzantine Emperor, and to al-Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt. The two letters are almost identical, quoting the same Qur'ānic verse:

> In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. From Muhammad, God's Messenger to Heracules, the Byzantine ruler. Peace be to those who follow right guidance. I call on you to believe in Islam. Adopt Islam and you will be safe, and God will give you a double reward. If you decline, you shall bear responsibility for the Arians.[9]

[9] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Book on the Start of Revelations to God's Messenger). The Arians were the followers of Arius, the Egyptian who believed in the Oneness of God and who denied that the Father and the Son were two manifestations of the Lord.

The only difference in the two letters concerned the addressee and his position, as well as replacing the word *Arians* in the letter to Heraculas with the word the *Copts* in the one to al-Muqawqis. Both were Christians, but they belonged to different churches. Heraculas did not question Diḥyah ibn Khalīfah, the Prophet's emissary. Instead he questioned Abū Sufyān thoroughly about the Prophet, demanding clear and truthful answers. He then declared that the answers suggested that Muhammad was truly a Prophet of God. Al-Muqawqis questioned Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah, who delivered the Prophet's message and confirmed that he expected the advent of God's last Messenger. He kept the Prophet's letter safe, treasuring it. However, each of them felt that accepting Islam would mean a loss of their position as ruler. They both sent the Prophet gifts, but al-Muqawqis's gifts were more varied and valuable.

Notable in the Prophet's address to the two rulers was the direct explanation of his message, which stated the point of departure from their beliefs. Both were Christians and were well read in their faiths. Al-Muqawqis was also the head of the Coptic Church. The Prophet also stated their responsibility in clear terms, telling them that should they refuse to accept his message, they would bear responsibility for depriving their peoples of the chance to follow God's message.

We may also include in this category the Prophet's letter to Hawdhah ibn 'Alī, the ruler of Yamāmah (in Eastern Arabia). The Prophet's letter was short: it explained the essence of Islam and promised that the Yamāmah ruler would continue in his office if he were to accept Islam. Hawdhah received the Prophet's Messenger, 'Ṣalīṭ ibn 'Amr, well and gave him a gift of some locally-woven clothes, but his answer to the Prophet was disappointing. He wrote that what the Prophet advocated was absolutely fine and appealing: "However, I am my people's best poet and orator. The Arabs around here hold me in awe. If you are prepared to grant me some authority, I will follow you."

The Prophet's reaction was that he would not grant the man an area of land as small as a single date. While Heraculas and al-Muqawqis decided to turn their backs on Islam for fear that they would lose their kingdoms, the ruler of Yamāmah wanted a bribe to follow it. The Prophet had promised that he would retain his position, but he had wanted more. In response, the Prophet clearly showed that no one could request anything in return for accepting Islam.

The third category includes the Prophet's letters to the Persian Emperor and to al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shammar, the Arab ruler of Syria. Al-Ḥārith was merely a provincial ruler, who deferred to the higher authority of the Byzantine Emperor. Yet, he was very displeased when he read the Prophet's letter. In a fit of fury, he threw the letter on the floor and said: "Who can take my kingdom

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away from me? I will be marching to him, even though he may be in Yemen." He started to take measures to mobilize his forces so as to put his threat into effect. Although he could command large forces to counter any opposition, he needed the Byzantine Emperor's approval of his plan before he could do anything. Heraculas answered his letter, making his disapproval of al-Ḥārith's plans clear. Therefore, al-Ḥārith did not go ahead.

The Prophet's letter to Khusru, the Persian Emperor, ran as follows:

> In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. From Muhammad, God's Messenger, to Khusru, the leader of Persia. Peace be to him who follows right guidance, believes in God and His Messenger, and declares that there is no deity but God, the only God who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. I wish to convey to you God's call, for I am God's Messenger to all mankind, sent with the task of warning all those who are alive that doom will befall the unbelievers. If you submit to God you will be safe. If you refuse, you shall bear the responsibility for the Magians.[10]

This letter differs substantially from the letter that was sent to Heraculas. There is strong emphasis here on God's Oneness and the fact that the author was God's Messenger. There is also specific stress on the position of God's Messenger as His servant. This was to make clear the status of the Prophet and the central idea of God's Oneness. Heraculas was a Christian who believed in God as One, even though the concept of the Trinity made such oneness vague. He was also aware of the status of God's Prophets and Messengers. The concept of God's Oneness was heavily distorted in Persia, where dualism had gained strong favour and the holy fire was kept alight and worshipped. It was necessary, therefore, to emphasize the central Islamic concept of God's Oneness.

When he looked at the letter, Khusru was also furious, because the Prophet mentioned himself first. He tore up the letter without reading it. He then sent to his governor in Yemen to send a couple of brave and strong men to arrest the Prophet and dispatch him to him. The Yemen governor did as he was instructed. When these men arrived in Madinah and gave the Prophet what they termed "the Emperor's orders" for him to surrender himself to them, the Prophet told them to wait. The following day he said to them: "My Lord has killed your lord last night", and then gave them further information that the Persian Emperor

[10] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, vol. 2, p. 654. The Magians is the Arabic name for Zoroastrians.

had been killed by his son. They were agitated and warned him that he risked his life for saying what he said. The Prophet told them to write it down and give the Yemeni governor a message: "My faith and power will reach further than that of Khusru... If you accept Islam, I will keep you in your position and give you authority over your people." He gave the two messengers a belt containing some gold and silver, which he had received as a gift from another king. When the Yemeni governor ascertained the truth of what the Prophet said, he accepted Islam. The Prophet retained him as governor of all Yemen until he died.

The final category contains the Prophet's letters to the ruler of Bahrain, which he sent much later. Those letters were sent early in year seven, but the one to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā of Bahrain was sent towards the end of year eight, after Makkah had fallen to Islam. The Prophet's letter was framed in the same terms as the letters that the Prophet sent to other rulers. Al-Mundhir wrote back: "Messenger of God, I have read your letter to the people of Bahrain. Some of them liked it and they accepted Islam. Others refused. There are Magians and Jews among my population and I await your instructions."[11]

The Prophet wrote back to him:

> In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. From Muhammad, God's Messenger, to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā. Peace be to you. I praise to you God who has no partners, and I bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. I remind you of God, the Almighty. He who does right, does it only unto himself; and he who obeys my Messengers obeys me; and he who gives them sound counsel gives it to me. My Messengers have praised you to me, and I accept your intercession on behalf of your people. Allow the Muslims among your people what they have in their hands. I pardon all those who have committed sins, so accept from them their pledges. We will not dismiss you from your office as long as you do well. Those who wish to stay Jews or Magians should pay a tribute as a sign of their loyalty.[12]

When we look at the Prophet's letters to the various rulers, including the two most powerful leaders in the world, we can identify several features that are common to all of them:

[11] Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, p. 263.
[12] Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *'Uyūn al-Athar*, Beirut, (n.d.), vol. 2, p. 267.

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The final category contains the Prophet's letters to the ruler of Bahrain, which he sent much later. Those letters were sent early in year seven, but the one to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā of Bahrain was sent towards the end of year eight, after Makkah had fallen to Islam. The Prophet's letter was framed in the same terms as the letters that the Prophet sent to other rulers. Al-Mundhir wrote back: "Messenger of God, I have read your letter to the people of Bahrain. Some of them liked it and they accepted Islam. Others refused. There are Magians and Jews among my population and I await your instructions."[11]

The Prophet wrote back to him:

> In the name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. From Muhammad, God's Messenger, to al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā. Peace be to you. I praise to you God who has no partners, and I bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. I remind you of God, the Almighty. He who does right, does it only unto himself; and he who obeys my Messengers obeys me; and he who gives them sound counsel gives it to me. My Messengers have praised you to me, and I accept your intercession on behalf of your people. Allow the Muslims among your people what they have in their hands. I pardon all those who have committed sins, so accept from them their pledges. We will not dismiss you from your office as long as you do well. Those who wish to stay Jews or Magians should pay a tribute as a sign of their loyalty.[12]

When we look at the Prophet's letters to the various rulers, including the two most powerful leaders in the world, we can identify several features that are common to all of them:

[11] Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, p. 263.
[12] Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *'Uyūn al-Athar*, Beirut, (n.d.), vol. 2, p. 267.

1. The Prophet's address is powerful and decisive, and it does not seek to appease anyone or to defer to any authority.
2. The Prophet puts his purpose in very clear terms: he wanted to deliver a message from God Almighty, and explained the consequences of the addressee's response, particularly if it is a negative one. Specifically, he highlighted that a ruler who denies the people a chance to learn of God's message bears responsibility for their continued unbelief.
3. The Prophet also made it clear that he was a Messenger to all mankind. He dispelled any thought that might be entertained by the addressee that he could be looking beyond the area assigned to him.
4. The Prophet further clarified that he had no ambition to extend his rule over the addressee's land. He had no interest in extending his political role.
5. Everyone was addressed in the language they understood. When the Prophet spoke to Christian rulers, his address took into consideration the fact that they believed in God, even though their concept of Him was at variance with that of Islam.
6. The Prophet further explained that no one would be coerced or pressured into accepting Islam, as the Qur'ānic principle that "there shall be no compulsion in matters of religion" (2: 256) needed to be upheld. Emperors, kings and rulers may try to force their populations to follow a certain line, but the Prophet made it clear that neither Jews nor Magians would be forced to accept Islam; they would only be required to pay a tax in return for being protected by the Islamic state.

CHAPTER 20

MUHAMMAD: THE MAN

SO, WHAT SORT OF MAN was Muhammad? The answer is that he was an ordinary man who, until he received God's message, led a very ordinary life. He went through a difficult childhood, which saw him losing his father before he was born, his mother at the age of six and his grandfather two years later. Yet, with all these losses he was not short of loving carers who could see that the young boy could have a bright future. He profoundly appreciated the love he was given, particularly by his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, and Abū Ṭālib's wife, Fāṭimah bint Asad. When Makkah endured some difficult times during Muhammad's adult life, he sought to reduce Abū Ṭālib's burden, suggesting to another uncle, al-ʿAbbās, that each of them should take one of Abū Ṭālib's children to look after. To Muhammad, this was merely a gesture expressing gratitude for a favour that he had never forgotten.

From his early years, Muhammad had a keen sense of right and, trusting to his natural instincts, he pursued what was right in every possible way. He never told a lie and was always fair. Perhaps being deprived of the care that only kind parents could provide helped him to realize what loss meant to other people. This might have encouraged him to try to prevent unwarranted loss by anyone: hence, his desire to pursue right and to enforce it by any fair means. He was an example of goodness, and long before prophethood, his reputation for honesty and fairness was second to none. His treatment of a slave lad given to him as a gift by his good wife was so benevolent that the lad preferred to stay with him to being reunited with his parents and family. To soften the blow for the lad's disappointed father, Muhammad adopted the lad as a son, with full rights of inheritance.

Such was Muhammad before becoming aware of the role God wanted to assign to him. God then entrusted him with His message, which aims to provide

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Several *aḥādīth*, by different reporters, highlight the fact that the Prophet never used foul language. Anas ibn Mālik reports: "God's Messenger was not given to the use of foul language, cursing or abusive names. When he expressed displeasure with someone, he would say, 'What is wrong with him; may he have dust on his forehead.'"[1] (Related by al-Bukhārī.) In answer to a question about the Prophet's manners, 'Ā'ishah said: "He never used foul or obscene language. Nor was he quarrelsome in the market place. He did not repay a bad turn with a similarly bad one, but would rather forgive and forebear." (Related by Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bayhaqī.) Another *ḥadīth* mentions that 'Aṭā' ibn Yasār asked 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr about the Prophet's description in the Torah. He said:

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These *aḥādīth* together give us a picture of a person who turns away from whatever is unbecoming and to whom good conduct comes naturally; he realizes that whatever comes from God is good. He is the first to implement it, at home and in public. The Prophet was the same in public and with his own family: he never used abusive or insulting language, cursed or engaged in a verbal quarrel. He was aware of his task of "bringing good manners to perfection."

He had a generous nature. When, within the space of a few years, his fortunes changed – from being driven out of his hometown, with a great prize on his head, to being the undisputed master of the whole of Arabia – the Prophet could have led a most luxurious life. However, he preferred to lead a simple life, free of all pretences of power, grandeur or material luxury. At times, he could have plenty in his hand, but he would give it all away within a very short period of time. Jābir reports: "God's Messenger never said, 'No', to anything he was asked." Even when he and his family were in need, he would give away whatever he had. He did not mind eating the simplest of food. Anas reports:

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It appears that the Prophet wanted to lead a very simple life, so that he would not be distinguished from the poor in his community. This fits with the Islamic view of this present life as transitory: it is the life to come that is more important, because it is everlasting and people's lots in it are determined by what they do during their present life on earth. Another report that illustrates his interaction with his community is given by ʿUthmān, who says: "We accompanied God's Messenger in travel and in town. He would visit the sick, attend our funerals and fight with us. He would lend us support with whatever he had." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Bazzār.)

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Some people think that the harder they drive themselves in fulfilling religious duties, the higher the position they will achieve in God's eyes. Yet Islam does not require people to overstrain themselves, as it steers a middle way. Indeed, it is referred to, in some religious texts as "the middle way". The Prophet's practical example shows that he understood this and put it into practice. 'Ā'ishah reports:

> Whenever the Prophet was given a choice between two options, he would choose the easier, unless it be sinful. If it was sinful, he would move furthest away from it. Never did he seek revenge for himself. However, if something God has prohibited was violated, he would seek to avenge that for God's sake. (Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.)

A similar *ḥadīth* mentions that "God's Messenger never beat anyone with his hand: he never beat a woman or a servant. [He used his hand] only when he was in jihad for God's cause. Never did he avenge himself for something done to him. Only when something God has prohibited was violated he would seek to avenge that for God's sake." (Related by Muslim.)

The Prophet's character shines as being that of a very modest man who never sought to press an advantage in anyway. At the same time, he was clearly dedicated to his message and would do everything in his power to ensure that people understood it clearly and could see how to put it into practice. He felt for others and would try hard to make it easy for them to understand God's message and implement what He required of them. In his speech during the farewell pilgrimage, for example, he outlined the major principles of Islam. At the end of every point he stressed, he would ask his audience: "Have I delivered God's message?" When they affirmed that he had done, he appealed to God to witness their acknowledgement.

The Prophet's modesty was apparent in the way he treated his followers. He realized that his Companions would be emulated by later generations of Muslims. Hence, he made sure to explain how he should be treated by them and by all Muslims. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb quotes him as saying: "Do not overpraise me like the Christians overpraise Jesus, son of Mary. I am only a servant of God. [In reference to me] say: God's servant and Messenger." (Related by al-Bukhārī and Ibn Ḥibbān.) How did they react to this? Anas ibn Mālik says: "No one was dearer to them than God's Messenger. Yet when they saw him coming, they did not stand up because they knew he disliked that." (Related by Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī.) He wanted to be seen as one of them.

The Prophet also impressed on his Companions that people distinguish themselves only by their manners and behaviour. In his address during his farewell pilgrimage, he said:

> People, your Lord is one and your father is one. No Arab has an advantage over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab; nor does a red skinned man over a black one, nor a black one over a red skinned one, except through God-fearing. (Related by Aḥmad.)

What can we say in conclusion? Whatever praise we may say will always fall short of what Muhammad, God's Messenger, deserves. He was the man who showed the way, and he taught goodness to humanity so that he would fulfil the aim of his mission that he expressed in his own words: "I have been sent so that I would bring good manners to perfection."

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MUSLIMS ALL OVER the world see Muhammad as God's last messenger to mankind, and, for every community that wants to live under God's guidance, the Prophet Muhammad's character and conduct is the light showing the way to God's pleasure. The Prophet's miracle was to give to humanity a system of life that provides for all the needs of body, mind and soul, and elevates man's aspirations towards a sublime ideal. Through his actions, he showed the way to achieve all this in a very simple, direct and truthful manner. He built a state that was dedicated to truth and justice and to the liberation of man throughout the world. He wrote to emperors, kings and rulers, calling on them to believe in God and to follow His message, yet, at the same time, he lived a life of poverty, leaving aside the riches that were offered to him.

At a time when the Prophet is much maligned by writers, cartoonists, and various other detractors, whose portrayal of him is both cursory and false, this book aims to show Muhammad's true character in detail, both in its most everyday and most extraordinary moments.

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Adil Salahi's writings include the acclaimed *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* and *Pioneers of Islamic Scholarship*, and the English translation of the eighteen-volume *In the Shade of the Qur'ān*. His main career has been in radio and print journalism, and for over thirty years he was editor of 'Islam in Perspective', a twice-weekly full-page column in the *Arab News*, a Saudi daily newspaper.

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Most certainly, yours is a sublime character. (Qur'ān 68: 4)